

TO: LUTSF  
22<sup>nd</sup> November 2005

Dear Dr Lewis

**RE: Research visit to TBA (Time Based Arts Festival) in Portland Oregon, USA. 8<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2005**

Please find enclosed my report on my recent visit to Portland Oregon to attend the Time Based Arts Festival (TBA) organised and managed by the Portland Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA).

My visit to the festival was extremely successful and timely, particularly in light of my recent shift in career from Director of a National Dance Agency to that of independent Producer. The trip was an opportunity for me to travel and meet new people within the arts and cultural sector in the US and begin to develop a connection with these people. While I feel this was achieved and I am confident that a number of professional relationships made will be kept, the biggest achievement or outcome was on a more personal /philosophical level. I learnt, through watching and witnessing, what the arts and cultural activity can do for a city or community; how the arts can be pivotal in bringing different people and different agendas together if it is done in the right spirit. It was both re-affirming and re-assuring to see how cultural activity can provide a common voice and is vital for a healthy, inquisitive and creative community.

Despite making this argument over and over again in my position as Director of an arts organisation in the UK, you sometimes begin to doubt or question your own rhetoric. Why do I do what I do? Is it worth it? Do the arts really make a difference or am I just saying that to get more money? It takes an opportunity such as the one I had, to allow yourself to stand back from the "day job", see it from a different perspective and remind yourself that you are "doing the right thing" and that it does make a difference.

I went to the TBA Festival thinking of it primarily as a networking opportunity. While this was indeed the case, on reflection it became a much needed opportunity to reflect on my own achievements, but also to look at how other people approach curatorship and programming, festival management and collaboration, especially between the arts and the corporate/business sector. In that sense it inspired me and injected some fresh energy into my ideas.

For any future awardees, I would advise that while you might undertake a trip with a clear set of aims or objectives, don't be surprised if they are not the only ones you come back with! Be open to what you see and don't censor your experience. Travel scholarships allow you to study and learn, they allow you to gain new skills but they also allow you to stand back, take stock and reflect on your practice whether as an artist, teacher, manager or producer.

In a fast and output driven world, artists and arts directors are constantly under pressure to "deliver the goods" and "make a difference". Creative ideas have to keep up with the pace of change, differing agendas, local politics, aesthetics, personal likes and dislikes and the whim or artistic agendas of producers, venues, festivals and funding sources. Time is often short for reflection, analysis and questioning, despite the fact that these are critical to continued artistic development. Therefore it is crucial that "safe spaces" exist in which individuals can stand back from what they do and examine their practice in more detail. There are a number of ways in which I plan to share the information gained from this visit.

I am a member of a number of promoter networks including the Guardians of Doubt (whose members include venue managers, producers and academics) and I also chair the meetings of the network of National Dance Agencies. Both these forums provide a place for regular information exchange. I am in regular contact with a number of artists and companies across the UK and Europe, many of whom would be interested in the work of PICA and the TBA festival. I can provide general information and guidance to these artists but also play an intermediary role between them and PICA, exploring touring and presentation opportunities as well as exchange visits.

I have recently been awarded a significant Arts Council grant for research and development, which will further enable me to travel, visit other festivals and arts organisations and meet other producers. Information sharing and networking will form a major part of this research period and again, my knowledge of PICA but also the general dance scene in the Pacific North West will be information I can easily share.

Yours Sincerely

Jane Greenfield

**Jane's report:  
Lisa Ullmann Traveling Scholarship Fund (LUTSF)**

**1. Introduction / Context**

After serving over 10 years as the Artistic Director of Dance 4 National Dance Agency and the international NOTT Dance Festival, I left the organization in December 2004 out of a desire to flex my creative muscle and feel a greater sense of freedom as a curator and presenter. It is within this context that I traveled to Portland Oregon to attend the Time Based Arts Festival (TBA) having been freelance for less than one year.

2005 has and continues to be about me re-positioning myself in the cultural sector. No longer bound by specific art forms, agendas or National Dance Agency politics, opportunities such as the Lisa Ullmann travel award have genuinely enabled me to exert myself and my position in a new light – that of an individual rather than a representative of an institution. While this may seem a small or insignificant shift to some, the opportunity to shake off a well worn mantle and feel the freedom to follow personal artistic interests and look at art for "arts sake" (at least for a while) rather than agonize over its accessibility, appropriateness, educational and social value, has been truly liberating.

My other interest in the TBA festival was that it seemed to share the same artistic philosophy as Nott Dance: rather than attempt to categorize and define artists and types of performance it celebrated creative diversity and stretched the margins of what we consider to be dance or performance or music or theatre. Having pushed that argument for over ten years in Nottingham, I wanted

to see how someone else approached it!

## 2. Project / Event details

The TBA Festival is a 10 day festival of contemporary dance, theatre, music, film, installation, outdoor work and late night events. I attended the first 7 days and saw performances by the Elizabeth Streb Company, Guy Dartnell, Ivana Müller, Faustin Linyekula / Les Studios Kabako, The Wally Cardona Quartet, Meow Meow, Allen Johnson, Breakfast of Champions, Fact or Fiction, Tracey and the Plastics, The Vaux Swifts and Lone Twin. In addition to this, I was asked to speak as part of panel discussion (noon time chats) looking at artist support and developing models for networks. Later in the week I was also invited to sit in and observe a regional dance network meeting between artists and organizations from the North West Pacific region. Despite the TBA Festival only being 3 years old, it carries the curatorial hallmarks and infra-structures of an event that should be celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary: the programme is “full on”, with site specific pieces in and round the city of Portland, evening shows in many of the major venues, noon time discussions, lecture and workshop programmes, film screenings and rounding off each day, a programme of late night cabaret style shows at the “Machine Works”, the festival club.

The 2005 festival also marked a significant changing of the guard. Its Artistic Director (and AD of PICA) Kristy Edmunds was leaving to take up her new position as Director the prestigious Melbourne International Arts Festival and Mark Russell, formally the Artistic Director of PS122, the experimental performance space in New York, was taking her place.

Kristy Edmunds' name is synonymous with contemporary arts and culture in Portland. She has galvanized, pushed, challenged, cajoled and converted many of the citizens, city officials and corporate businesses to not only get behind the festival but take real pride and ownership in it. And it was this spirit of cultural giving and personal investment that impressed me the most. Yes, the artistic programme was strong and varied and I carried away a few personal favorites such as the Veux Swifts roosting event at sun down and Ivana Muller's spoof lecture performance delivered with a dead pan humour by her co-performer Bill Atchison – but the willingness of Portland to put their name to the festival whether it be with money, donations, volunteering, resource giving or support in kind, was truly impressive.

The act of giving always makes one feel better or more worthy but as an arts promoter from the UK, where gaining the support of sponsors, local businesses and even board members to engage in contemporary and experimental arts, seems a constant uphill battle, there was more than a touch of envy as I witnessed the great and the good wanting to be associated with TBA. Whatever their motives, PICA trustees were charged with looking after international guests, Nike (whose world headquarters are in Portland) were one of the major sponsors, local property developers donated the industrial warehouse for the festival club and ten of the region's top “white tablecloth” chefs were invited to put their haute cuisine skills to the test and produce cheap cafeteria food for the late night revelers at the Machine Works.

Away from the corporate success of the festival, I also had chance to meet and talk to a number of artists and arts activists who reside in Portland. Portland itself is a relatively small city and has a reputation for being progressive and liberal in its attitudes (suffice to say it remains a democratic stronghold). No surprise then that there is a growing community of choreographers, visual artists and filmmakers all making their home there.

In many ways, the artist community experience the same infra-structural strengths and weaknesses as artists in the UK, there are arts agencies and networks who support the promotion and distribution of work, there are platform events, spaces for working and showing and opportunities for artists to collaborate. The major difference of course is that there is no arts council equivalent and there can be a real sense of isolation amongst peer groups because geographical distances between major cities or cultural institutions are great. The main independent dance community is spread between Portland, Seattle and Vancouver to the north and San Francisco to the south. One of the key agencies serving their needs is the National Dance Project – a funding and professional development organisation. During the regional artist meeting I attended, a new dance initiative was being evaluated. The Regional Dance Development Initiative, a two-week intensive choreographic residency in Seattle, was the first project of its kind to address the choreographic and administrative needs of young dance artists and companies. Akin to the dance PAL lab in the UK or NDA artist focused retreats; the residency was lead by a mix of experienced choreographers, dance managers and guest producers. The participating artists clearly benefited from the project, seeing it as something quite unique this made me realize yet again just how well served the dance community is in the UK compared to the US.

I was also interested to meet artists and practitioners from other fields or those working within an inter-disciplinary practice or body based work, as this was more my background as a presenter. One of the artists I shared the panel discussion with was Linda Johnson. A choreographer and movement artist by training, Linda's work had become much more installation based and in particular using outdoor landscapes to present or contextualize her work. We discovered we both have a passion for landscape design and horticulture and how it can be used within an artistic or performative context. Her most recent project was entitled “Tax Lot” in which she took over a roundabout and planted and grew crops on it – the produce of which would supply local soup kitchens. Motorists became the audience, seeing the work grow with each passing day.

I also spent time with Dori Vollun. A visual artist in her own right, but also a very active trustee of PICAs board, Dori sits on a number of local government panels responsible for Portland's public art and outdoor urban spaces. I had noticed the proliferation of public art in small parks and green spaces, especially in the Pearl District, which is the cultural quarter of Portland and currently under going a major transformation in terms of building regeneration, landscaping and inner city living. Unusually, the local government committees and urban renewal agencies responsible for this area of development includes members from the arts community, architects and designers – arts and local government and public and private sectors working collaboratively and sharing responsibility for what Portland should look like.

Again from a performance and landscape perspective I was struck by two outdoor spaces in particular – Jamison Park and Tanner Springs Park. Jamison Park was dominated by a large water pool which apparently was used as a performance space for a Butoh artist the previous year and Tanner Springs Park, a functioning wet land park, was framed by a 60 ft long “art wall”, a permanent art installation/sculpture made from different sized rusting railway sleepers forming a curved backdrop to the whole space.

The only slightly disappointing aspect to my visit was that I expected to encounter a larger number of visiting promoters and producers whom I could network with. Perhaps this lack of presence was due in part to TBA only being 3 years old and still establishing its international profile on the festival circuit. However, I did have the opportunity to spend time with the PICA and TBA team, in particular, Erin Boberg the new Executive Director of PICA and Mark Russell, who will be the new Festival Director from 2006. In addition to this I met Simon Dove (Director of SpringDance Festival in Utrecht Holland) Philip Bither (Curator of the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis) and Co Directors of White Bird Dance, Walter Jaffe and Paul King.

### 3. Conclusions

I went to Portland, I saw and I learnt! I came away with ideas, plans and new contacts. While the performance programme itself didn't make me jump out of my seat, the festival as a complete concept, as a city celebration, as a platform for art and business to join together, truly impressed me and has given me food for thought in terms of my own ideas for planning and managing future cultural events. I have always been mistrustful of the art and business relationship, believing it to lack any genuine creative meeting point but TBA helped me to see that differently and understand that it is possible.

### 4. Outcomes / The Future

I have worked hard on developing a creative relationship with PICA and its festival over the last 4 years and my personal visit this year will hopefully further that connection. I feel confident that I can continue to dialogue with Erin Boberg and Mark Russell on collaborative ideas and making recommendations on UK and European artists whom I feel would be right for their programme. I am particularly interested in exploring the potential for artist exchanges and mentoring schemes between Portland and the UK and feeding ideas into their site-specific and installation part of the festival.

The visit also enabled me to catch up with a number of Portland artists I presented in Nott Dance 04 and 05. And again there is a strong desire on both sides to maintain these relationships. MK Guth, whose work I presented in my final Nott Dance this year, has nominated me as a visiting guest lecturer at the Portland School of Art and I am offering informal advice and mentoring to solo artist AC Dickson who is looking to tour his work further in the UK.

While away in Portland, I learnt that I had been awarded an ACE Research and Development grant that will fund me for one year to research, investigate and further plan international collaborations, installation work and projects that combine performance and landscape. Although not appreciating it at the time, my visit to Portland has become the first step on my year-long research. My experience there has helped to set the tone and focus my thinking.

Thank you!

Jane Greenfield  
22.11.05

#### Useful websites:

PICA - [www.pica.org](http://www.pica.org)  
White Bird - [www.whitebird.org](http://www.whitebird.org)  
On The Boards - [www.ontheboards.org](http://www.ontheboards.org)  
National Dance Project - [www.nefa.org](http://www.nefa.org)  
PS122 [www.ps122.org](http://www.ps122.org)  
Jamison and Tanner Park - [www.portlandonline.com/parks](http://www.portlandonline.com/parks)  
Regional Arts and Cultural Council – [www.racc.org](http://www.racc.org)  
Walker Arts Centre, Minneapolis - [www.walkerart.org](http://www.walkerart.org)