

29 January 2007

Dear LUTSF

I would like to take this opportunity to firstly apologise for the late arrival of my report. Secondly, many thanks for my scholarship, awarded by the committee of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund, which enabled me to go to New York for three weeks and carry out a period of professional development in summer/autumn 2006.

My experience was extremely positive in a number of areas. As a performer I focussed on participating in classes and workshops, where I learnt new skills, and how to then maintain these in order to develop as an artist. I was particularly drawn to areas of performance that involved a highly physical movement vocabulary and equipment/structures to aid the choreography. I enjoyed the challenge and excitement that this work gave my body physically and as an audience member. Being introduced to the New York dance scene, I met many fellow artists, and some who were experiencing the city for the first time like myself. This was both refreshing and educational as I learnt where we had similarities and how some areas of our profession differ, but in a positive way. I would definitely recommend a lot of pre planning, even before you've submitted your application. Having a detailed schedule for when I arrived in New York enabled me to make the most of my time out there.

From the numerous classes I participated in, I am to adapt material for my own teaching practice, which will reach degree level dance students, college students and dance enthusiasts. I will also encourage dancers to become more versatile as artists, and to make the most of any new experience, which will only develop them further as individuals.

Please find enclosed copies of my report. Many thanks

Kate Mason

Report: Kate Mason

Professional Development in New York

After experiencing a varied five years working in the British dance scene, I felt I needed some new life interjected into a career that I have always felt so strongly about, but that had started to lose momentum. I began by researching places of interest outside of the UK including areas of Europe and Asia, but the one place which held my attention the most and had given fellow dance artists so many positive experiences was New York.

Before I applied to the LUTSF I undertook further research in to the logistics of my stay, which included my decision to visit in summer 2006, and how I was going to create a three-week period of professional development with the numerous resources that the city had to offer. My priority for the three weeks was to develop my practical skills, which would involve participating in classes and workshops and the possibility of sharing creative ideas.

Whilst writing my application I contacted some of the main organisations including *Dance NewAmsterdam*, *Movement Research* and *The Field*, which gave me confirmation that the period I wanted to visit was going to be a hub of activity for getting involved practically and observing work. After submitting my application I kept thinking about the prospect of travelling to New York, especially after my research had given me such an insight in to what the city has to offer. Luckily I was successful and awarded a Scholarship to go there.

My next step was to put my research into action, and so with the information I had received from organisations, dance centres, venues and companies, I began to create a detailed schedule for the three weeks. This might sound very over organised, but with so many options I didn't want to waste time wondering what to do on arriving there. I also wanted to secure my accommodation for the duration, and chose a hostel (Hostel International), which had good accessibility to central Manhattan and public transport if I needed to use it.

On arriving in New York I was amazed at the immediate impact the city had on me. Just entering Manhattan in a taxi full of fellow travellers made me realise that my experience had already begun, and I felt an urge to converse with these strangers as to why I was here. During my time in New York my schedule shifted in relation to what experiences I benefited from the most, and resulted in me re-visiting some establishments rather than trying to connect with a new place each day.

*Dance NewAmsterdam (DNA)* (see photo 2) was situated in lower Manhattan, very accessible from the metro. As I entered the building I was initially drawn to the space in which the studios were based and the extremely welcoming atmosphere. My first class was with Stephanie Liapis who focussed her session on challenging the dancer both physically and artistically, whilst maintaining a sense of release and abandonment. The quality and content of the class was in the direction that I like to be pushed in and after a conversation with Liapis and fellow participants I discovered that *DNA* was going to be an integral part of my development in New York.

Oliver Steele's approach incorporates yoga-based vocabulary at the initial stages of the class. His final goal is to maintain a clear mind, grounded crisp technique, and most of all a high quality in contemporary movement as the body is getting exhausted. I also took class with teacher, Heather McArdle. She looks at how to initiate movement more efficiently with strength and clarity, whilst maintaining a sense of freedom and individuality. Also combining off balanced gestures, inversions and drastic weight shifts. It was pleasing and refreshing to see similarities in the movement vocabularies of the artists at *DNA* and those working in the UK.

*Steps on Broadway* is based west of Central Park, and was initially like stepping in to a scene from American classic, *Fame!* It was only as I explored the dance centre further that I realised the extent of their class programme. I decided to sign up for a workshop with *Batsheva Dance Company*. The company is based in Israel, but had been performing in New York as part of the Lincoln Centre Festival. On entering the 'loft' studio the company had covered all mirrors and on looking windows. As the workshop progressed I learnt how beneficial this was to their practice. It enables each participant to perform the exercises fully without feeling any form of self-consciousness. Gaga technique, developed by Ohad Naharin, is the daily training of the *Batsheva* dancers. Gaga works on multi-dimensional movement, the efficiency and texture of the movement, the use of explosive power along with executing clarity and building stamina. The use of gaga helps dancers to maximise the use of their current technique and strengths, but also acquiring new ones.

This particular workshop concentrated on different forms of improvisation lead by the company member. We shifted seamlessly, from one exercise to another, exploring our maximum movement range in each task. To bring the workshop to a close we learnt a section of repertory, which emphasised the clarity of intention that is used in their work. Participating in this workshop made

me realise how complimentary this training was to their work and building Strength and technique doesn't always have to exist in a traditional class format.

As I made my way to the *Trisha Brown Dance Studios* I passed the very impressive *Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre* establishment. I couldn't resist having a look around the building and also what their class programme had to offer. Unfortunately there were no classes suitable, as the summer term had ended. At Trisha Brown Dance Studios I was to take class with company member, Todd Stone. We began the session by looking at the skeleton, and the natural function of each joint in the body, which was our focus for the class. Maintaining this intention with each exercise enabled me to generate the right amount of energy, speed and dynamics, which were needed, without pre-empting movement. Taking class here has inspired me to explore further this approach to movement.

*Peridance* is situated in central Manhattan, just next to Union Square. The dance centre has an extensive class programme and is also home to the

*Limon School*. I decided to take advantage of the Limon faculty, taking class with Geraldine Cardiel and Alan Danielson, who use the principals of Humphrey-Limon. Cardiel works with fall-recovery, suspension and expansion. The energy of the class was vibrant and supportive and Cardiel would continuously challenge our individual movement range. Danielson's class combines a strong technical basis with a focus on musicality and freedom of movement. After graduating from Laban five years ago, I have lost some of the fundamentals of Limon technique so it was great to go back to the key elements of the technique, and remind my body of how they feel. I enjoyed moving with Danielson's humanistic approach, which involves rhythm and kinetics.

*Streb*, based in Brooklyn, Founded by Elizabeth Streb more than 20 years ago, is a company that I have followed since they appeared at the Barbican about seven years ago, and so participating in some training with the company was high on my agenda. I joined the Flip and tuck programme that ran weekly, lead by company member Fabio Tavares. The class helps the beginner tumbler build strength, flexibility and overall body awareness, which is then used to perform basic acrobatic tricks on floor and trampoline.

*Streb Laboratory for action mechanics (SLAM)* was like a giant playground to me, with various equipment including a human sized hamster wheel, a tumbling floor, trampolines, ricochet walls and more! As a performer I am drawn to challenging my body and stepping in to unknown territory which takes me to extremes, and satisfies my need to push myself and learn new skills. Taking class with *Streb* was a highly positive experience, and one, which has changed my training and outlook on my performance work for the future. I hope to be able to take part in *Streb's* future professional opportunities.

The summer months are filled with opportunities to see live performance, and so having chosen August I was pleased to see just how much was on offer. Prior to my visit I had researched what was appearing at the various venues, which New York based companies were performing and the outdoor spaces/structures that were being used to accommodate a variety of events. The Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival, which takes place throughout the whole of August each year, had a programme suitable for all ages, which included dance, music, puppetry and circus. My first experience was, *We B Girlz, 'All girl poppin' lockin' breakin' hip hop challenge* (See photo 1). Whilst sat there, enjoying the battle I realised one of the guest 'B Girlz' judges of the competition, was staying in my room at the hostel! The event proved extremely popular with the locals, especially when the New York City crew won the final against Philadelphia. The atmosphere was electric! The following day I managed to catch a colourful and energetic performance by *Nii Tettey Tetteh* and the *Kusan Ensemble, 'Gutsy Ghanaian drumming and dancing'*. *Wire Monkey Dance* was a company that I was excited about, even before I'd seen them perform. Whilst observing tall scaffolding structures, and various walk ways which connected them, I could sense that *Precarious* was going to inspire me. After being transfixed for an hour by gravity defying choreography, with an extremely physical content, I knew this was a company that I wanted to learn more about.

I approached Jennifer Polins, Co-Director and choreographer to find out more about the company and possible opportunities to undertake training with them. Another great event that featured at the *Out of Doors* festival was *Dance Off! Happy Hour*. The evening was hosted by Terry Dean, Associate Artistic Director of *Streb*, and Katie Workum. The programme included work from the following artists/companies: *Big Dance Theater, The candidatos, Keigwin and Company, Young Dance Collective, Battleworks dance Company, Ivy Baldwin Dance, Ryan Bronz, Terry Dean and Katie Workum*. This event gave me an insight into the kind of dance work being created throughout the city and I found it both refreshing and exciting to see the variety of work being produced.

Lower Manhattan Cultural Council presents *Sitelines* each summer, in association with the *River to River Festival*. As part of their summer 2006 programme they had invited H.T Chen (H.T Dance Company) and Sharon Estacio to work in collaboration on new site-specific work to be based around the Pavillion in Columbus Park. H.T Chen's choreography *Oasis* and work by Sharon Estacio entitled *Eat, Sleep, Swim...Fly...Crawl* (see photo's 4 and 5) was scheduled to appear at the park over the course of one week. The two choreographers had used their environment well and the experience of collaborating together appeared to add a whole new angle to their work. *'I spent a lot of time in the park during this process, and investigated the different way's people would let go of anything external... like shedding skin'*, (Estacio, 2006). *'This was also my first time collaborating with another choreographer during the creation process, which added a whole new, interesting element'*, (Chen, 2006).

The residents of China Town mainly used the pavilion in Columbus Park. It was fascinating to see how they responded to the dancers, who were in a sense invading their social space. They looked intrigued by what was happening and enjoyed close proximity between both them and the performers during certain moments in the choreography. It was exciting to see how this public space had been transformed in to a venue for performance, but could also revert back to its day-to-day purpose. Lower Manhattan Cultural Council had also commissioned

*Ellis Wood Dance* to create a piece for the *Sitelines* festival. *Fire on Wall Street* was performed on the outer balconies of the landmark Cipriani Building, located at 55 Wall Street in New York city (see photo 6) and attracted many Wall street employees. I thought it brought a fresh and vibrant energy in to what can feel like a very closed off and work driven environment.

Central Park held it's annual festival, *Summerstage*, which begins in June and runs until September. Urban Bush Women and Creative Outlet Dance Theatre of Brooklyn (see photo 3) were just some of the companies appearing in the festival line up. Sharing a blanket with some fellow dance enthusiasts, on a hot summers evening in the centre of Central Park, was one of many moments, which made me appreciate the opportunity I'd been given! Creative Outlet Dance Theatre of Brooklyn began the evening with a selection of their exuberant and highly athletic dance, then Urban Bush Women completed the programme with a piece entitled, *Walking with Pearl ... Africa Diaries*. The content of this particular work was strong and very moving, and it was obvious that the dancers had completely immersed themselves in the choreography.

Amongst my experiences at the many programmes on offer in and outside various spaces in New York, I visited the prestigious New York State Theatre where the Mark Morris dance Group was performing as part of the *Mostly Mozart* festival. The sheer scale and design of the New York State Theatre was breath taking, and I hadn't even sat down to watch the performance! As always **the** Mark Morris Dance Group had outstanding musicality, as they performed to the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, and the clarity

executed in each movement was simply stunning. As you can see I was very impressed! The variety of performances, ranging from size, venue, style and location seem to be squeezed in to each area of New York, forever bringing new inspiration to this city of culture.

My experience in New York gave also me an opportunity to meet fellow performance artists, which happened on a daily basis! It was so refreshing to hear how professionals survived in New York as either a freelance artist or in full time employment. There were lots of similarities in how we schedule our work, which includes a mixture of independent projects, teaching and performing, with many artists also learning how to lead yoga/Pilate's classes in order to extend their CV and to supplement their income. Some of the contacts I have made include possible choreographic opportunities, venues to platform choreography and artists interested in making collaborative work.

Travelling out to New York instilled my drive for dance and the surrounding art world. A simple change of environment made me realise the extent of opportunities that are out there, and excited about a future filled with learning more about my profession. I have also taken on board certain establishment's approach to teaching and I'm looking forward to adapting some of the class material I learnt for my own teaching practice. I have also included a list of recommendations on my company website, ([www.mobiusdance.com](http://www.mobiusdance.com)). See the 'news' page!

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