

15th October 2012

Dear LUTSF,

I am writing with details of my time as Guest Artist In Residence at the Tainan Community University Tai-Jian Campus, Tainan City, Taiwan and with my reflections on this experience.

My scholarship enabled me to accept an invitation to lead a children's dance workshop that culminated in a site-specific performance and to take part in a symposium at the end of the residency. The project took place from 13 July 2012 to 29 July 2012.

The project was extremely enjoyable and hugely rewarding. As I had anticipated, the new context afforded by this project, and the challenges of teaching through translation, have proven extremely useful in evaluating my own skills and teaching methodology.

I write having just moved to Brighton to embark on a Master of Arts degree in Performance and Visual Practices at Brighton University. In tandem with the work that I make, and continuing to practice writing as a means of reflecting on my work, I shall be starting my own blog. I intend to post the attached report as soon as the blog is up and running. And, in the fullness of time, my colleague and fellow guest artist in Tainan, Iris Tomlinson and I, intend to look for opportunities to deliver similar projects here in Brighton where we both live.

I hope you enjoy reading about the residency. If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to LUTSF for supporting me in this wonderful opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Katy Pendlebury

REPORT

Cultural exchange through dance

My experience as guest artist in residency at the Tai-Jian Community University, Tainan City, Taiwan

July 2012

In March of this year, I accepted an invitation to be a guest artist in residency at Tainan Community University in Tainan City, Taiwan. I was invited to devise a week-long workshop, the aim of which was to encourage local children to express themselves through the language of dance. In tandem, my colleague Iris Tomlinson, internationally recognised teacher of dance technique/composition, methodology and t'ai chi was invited to lead a group of elder dancers who meet at the Community University to dance and perform together. The week was to start with a press conference at the Temple in which the university is situated, followed by the six day residency. A symposium, to which Taiwanese dance teaching professionals were invited, would mark the end of the residency. The subject of the symposium was the notion of cultural exchange through dance and the occasion afforded the university and ourselves the possibility to exchange ideas and feedback to each other about the experience of the residency.

Prior to the trip, our colleague Kuei-ju Tung, dance artist and teacher at the Community University, had articulated the purpose of the children's workshop as being several-fold; to give children who did not ordinarily have access to dance experiences the chance to participate in a workshop, to explore their own culture and environment (by situating the workshops in and around the Temple), to expose them to another culture (by inviting me and Iris to teach) and, through the symposium, to reflect on ideas around 'community dance', what it is and how it is seen respectively in Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

Before leaving the UK, I had little, or no idea what kind of institution a 'Community University' would be like. I envisaged something along the lines of a British adult education college. Through the residency, and exchanges with the university and teaching professionals in Tainan, I came to understand their notion of a community university and its function within society, and, perhaps as a result, to learn a little about Taiwanese concepts of 'society', 'community' and 'citizenship'. Through this report I shall attempt to articulate my understanding and document its impact on myself and my work.

Preparation in Taipei, Taiwan

There are a choice of two airports in Taiwan from which access to Tainan City is similar – Taipei and Kaoshiung. Iris and myself both chose to fly to Taipei, where we spent a few days planning our workshops with Kuei-ju Tung, and sightseeing. Kuei-ju took us to the Lung Shan Temple in Taipei, our first encounter with the role of the temple in community life. My overwhelming impressions were that it was full of colour, activity, and people. There was a sense of reverence – people were praying to various Gods – however there was also a sense of informality – groups of people sat in the cloisters chatting and passing the time of day.



Photos from the Lung Shan Temple, Taipei

Many tourists like ourselves were visiting the Temple, however, it was abundantly clear that this hub of activity was at the centre of daily life for this particular district of Taipei, both as a place of worship and as somewhere to meet friends and family.

During our visit to Taipei, I was also lucky enough to visit the hot springs at Beitou. I spent an evening enjoying the soothing waters of the springs in a traditional hot springs hotel. The waters are piped into the hotel and the guests can choose to bathe in private, or communal areas.

The Community University

The Community University is located in Tainan City on the south west coast of Taiwan, a short distance inland. We arrived in Tainan late one evening by high-speed train from Taipei, a distance of 300 kilometres, which took two hours! Tainan City was the capital of Taiwan until 1885 and is famous for having the highest density of temples of any city in Taiwan and also for its cuisine, especially its street food!

The Community University has several campuses in Tainan City, one of which is in the Tsao-Huang Temple in Tai-Jian. A former farming and fishing community, Tai-Jian is situated on the outskirts of Tainan. Surrounded by rice paddies and irrigation channels, it has a very different character to that of downtown Tainan.

The morning following our arrival we visited the Community University accompanied by Kuei-ju. We were warmly welcomed by Mr Gin Thez Wu, Director of the Temple, Mr Mao-Cheng Wu, Director of the Tai-Jiang Campus of the Tainan Community University and Guan Chou Lin,

Executive Director of the Tainan Community University. The Community University had organised a press conference to publicise our residency and the symposium to follow. One of the dance groups directed by Kuei-ju, the Che-Gu adult dance group, with whom Iris would be working during the residency, treated us to a performance in the temple courtyard. For fun, and in the spirit of the residency - of cultural exchange - they taught us a small excerpt of one of their dances. Kuei-ju, Mr Chen and Mr Mao-Cheng Wu took us on a tour of the temple and the university, explaining the role of the university and the kind of education it provided to local residents.

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.



A press report announcing the beginning of our residency with Iris and Katy trying out a traditional Taiwanese dance & carvings on the temple roof

Chin-Fan Tasi, a dancer from the group then accompanied us on a short tour of the surrounding area. I took the opportunity to take many photographs of the temple and its beautiful sculptures and carvings. Kuei-ju had mentioned that she thought it would be interesting for the children to explore their local environment in the dance workshop, and therefore asked if I might use the temple and the surrounding countryside as inspiration for my source material.



Iris Tomlinson and Chin-Fan Tasi near the Tsao-Huang Temple in Tai-Jian and a sculpture of a lion at the door to the Temple



*From left to right:
Chin-Fan Tasi, Mr Chen, Iris Tomlinson,
Kuei-ju Tung*

Education and Citizenship

Through talking with Kuei-ju, and our hosts at the community university, it was becoming clear to me that concepts of education and citizenship are closely linked. The university provides educational courses and community projects in environmental protection, social policy, languages, agriculture and the arts. It sees its role as being the education of local people in terms of both expanding their knowledge and experience, but also in terms of educating them and enabling them as citizens. Such a concept of education does not merely place responsibility on its pupils within society, it also takes responsibility, in that it sees education, for example, learning dance and belonging to a dance group, as a way of exercising citizenship, of belonging to society. A healthy, happy and engaged person has much to give society.

The Community University's end of year fair and performance took place a day or two later and reinforced my perceptions. Various groups from the University, including a women's dance group directed by Kuei-ju, performed their work on an outdoor stage – be it dance, music, theatre or t'ai chi. Craft work, gardening and environmental projects were displayed on stalls around the performance site. The outdoor event was well attended, in spite of persistent rain, the audience watching from under their umbrellas.

Under the direction of, and with a great deal of hard work on the part of dancer and choreographer Kuei-ju Tung, the Community University is building a portfolio of dance activity that local people can become involved in. With the Che-Gu dance group, Kuei-ju teaches and reinterprets Taiwanese dance forms from a contemporary dance perspective and with the Tainan Community University Dance (women's) Group she uses contemporary dance to help the students build a relationship with their bodies, with dance, and as a starting point from which to devise performance material. This group has developed out of the regular contemporary dance courses of the community university. They often devise site-specific work together, exploring connections to their lives and surroundings. You can see some of their performances here <http://youtu.be/4mo76S5Ms8Q> and here <http://youtu.be/T-t1ONGepZc>.

(I will not say too much about the Che-Gu dance group here as I'm sure Iris, who led their workshop, will describe their work in detail in her report.)

The Residency

Rather than go into great detail about the content and structure of the children's workshop - I have chosen to concentrate on a few aspects of the project that I feel, will have a lasting impact on myself and my future work. However, I will describe briefly the process we followed during the week.

The workshop lasted six days, beginning on Monday and culminating on Saturday with a performance in the temple. On the last day, and to open the symposium, the children showed the site-specific dance piece that we had devised together over the course of the week. Each day we met together first thing in the morning either in the university's rehearsal space, a large studio near to the temple, or in the temple itself. I led a warm up class followed by creative tasks and structured improvisation around the themes that I had chosen in collaboration with Kuei-ju. The dancers were between eight and twelve years old and for many of them this was to be one of their first, if not their first, encounter with dance. Kuei-ju was keen to relate their dance experience to their local area so we decided I would take inspiration from the temple building itself and the surrounding natural environment. On the third morning, Kuei-ju had organised for the children to visit the farm of Mr and Mrs Jiang, a couple who both danced with the Che-Gu Dance Group. This excursion provided the children with opportunities to look at, and think about the natural forms that inspired the creative tasks and structured improvisations I had set.



Katy teaching in the studio of the Tai-Jian Community University, Mr Jiang leading the children a field trip to the countryside near the Temple

The first thing I would like to say about the experience of teaching at the Community University is that the level of welcome and support for us as teachers was humbling. In my sessions as well as a translator (a role fulfilled by Kuei-ju or another of her students), Kuei-ju had also arranged for around six other students to assist me every day. In addition, at break times Mr and Mrs Jiang and some of the other temple-goers provided food and drink for all the children and, if we were working elsewhere, escorted them to and from the Temple where they were collected.

This level of support had several effects - the most significant being that not having to think about, or manage, the organisational aspects of the children's mornings meant that I was free to concentrate solely on their experience of dancing. Secondly, it meant that in a very short time period we were able to create and organise a site-specific piece with a group of children some of whom had never danced before. This may not sound significant, however, it must be

remembered that with no experience of dance, some of the children had no knowledge of the 'form' of a dance class or exploratory workshop – in such a situation even simple tasks such as organising the dancers in space can prove challenging. The presence of other bodies showing the children examples of dance ideas they could use in their creative work helped their confidence when trying things out and showing their work to the group. And the enthusiasm of the assistants when helping each group meant that I didn't have the usual feeling of needing to split myself into parts when we were working in small groups. All in all, the level of support meant that I could concentrate on teaching and the children felt supported and safe enough to get on and enjoy dancing.



From left to right: Kuei-ju Tung assisting the dancers, Bobo Chen assisting the dancers

The second thing that I would like to mention is the site-specific performance with which the residency culminated. At the beginning of the week, I had had reservations about the necessity of making a performance piece to show. My reasons being that for many of these children it was their first experience of taking part in a dance workshop, and the idea that a 'performance' should be part of that experience did not sit entirely comfortably with me. However, with hindsight, I think that the vehicle of the performance had many good outcomes. It brought the children together as a group and allowed them to feel part of something and to have something to work towards. As well as dancing for themselves, they also learned about dancing and working together, and about how their own individual ideas could fit into a greater whole. I think it was exciting for them to perform to an audience, and to relate to the space of the Temple in a different and unique way than they had done so before. An excerpt of the performance can be seen here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDB3mYGFwBE&feature=share&list=UUX1UALBevZgiq1MDITzxIDg>

Thirdly, the task of teaching a group of children who did not speak my own language brought its own challenges, but proved extremely interesting. It brought home to me how much I rely on my own voice in my teaching. There are a number of ways in which dance teachers do this – to give energy and motivation to their students, to aid in the demonstration of the particular quality or energy of a movement, and, in a structured improvisation, to create an imaginative world for the children to explore particular dance ideas and movement qualities. Through the voice of a translator, Kuei-ju or Yu-Ju Su, the first two options were available to me, however, the echo that occurred and the consequent translation of the idea – which was both a translation of a linguistic and a dance idea – proved interesting. Not being able to speak Chinese I found myself constantly curious as to which aspects of what I had said Kuei or Yu-Ju had chosen to translate! In the structured improvisations, I found myself veering away from my usual way of working – using my voice to conjure up images and movement qualities for the

dancers – towards bringing visual material and relying more heavily on demonstration. The challenges came when working with material which could be interpreted in different ways – as one painting of a tree in the wind showing certain textures and movement may speak to one dancer, or one translator, and a different painting to a different translator, and so on.



The dancers looking at some of our source material with me

I was happily surprised that my teaching experience and understanding of the capabilities of children of that age-group stood me in good stead for this project. Teaching in such a different context and through translation allowed me to appreciate my own skills in creating material and tasks for a diverse group, motivating them and inspiring them to want to dance and make dance. Another pleasant discovery was that although I was teaching a group of dancers from a different culture than my own, my expectations of their abilities and what they could achieve over the course of a week proved more or less correct.

The Symposium

On the final Saturday of the residency, the children ‘opened the show’ with the site-specific piece we had made in the Temple. The Che-Gu Dance Group then performed the dances they had made during Iris Tomlinson’s residency. In the spirit of exchanging ideas about dance, community dance and education, Iris and I were invited to talk about our experiences of teaching and to share some of our previous work. Kuei-ju presented her work at the Community University and some of her students talked about their experiences of discovering dance through Kuei’s sessions. Following the formal presentation of our work, we then formed a discussion group to share ideas about how to go about our work in a more informal setting. Professor Ann Tai, Associate Professor of the Department of Dance at Tainan University of Technology attended the day’s proceedings and joined our conversations and exchanges. The whole day was inspiring and enlightening, especially hearing from some of Kuei-ju’s students, for some of whom discovering dance had had a profound effect on the quality of their lives.

The last thing I would like to mention about the experience of taking part in this residency is that it has reinforced my belief in generosity. I have had the pleasure of experiencing two very different cultures on opposing sides of the globe this year – Argentinian and Taiwanese – but both revealed an enormous capacity for generosity. It was a great privilege to teach in an environment in which the people around me showed such generosity of spirit towards myself, my colleague Iris, and towards the students taking part in the residencies. Through this experience I have come to realise that it is as much the values of the people with whom I work, as their skills, that are important to me.

Notes and Credits

Photos taken by Katy Pendlebury and the Tainan Community University.
Video footage by the Tainan Community University

The travel cost of this project was supported by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund.