

PAUL LIBURD MBE

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Dear LUTSF,

RE: Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund Report.

Please find below my report and account of my recent trip to New York USA. The length of my visit was for two weeks taking place over the Easter break and school holidays from 1st April through to 15th April 2018.

The purpose of my visit was to observe the Graham technique being delivered, taught and executed back at the roots and home of the technique. My invitations and places of interest were the Martha Graham Company, Graham 2, Martha Graham School, The Ailey School and The Juilliard School. The Graham technique is part of the curriculum at all of these institutions at varied levels.

I would like to thank the LUTSF committee for co-funding this trip and making it possible. This has been on my agenda for a few years and I cannot express how inspired and enriched this journey has left me. The learning from my trip has already made an impact on my work in the studio, and on the day-to-day structure and delivery of my classes.

Much gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Liburd', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Paul Liburd

Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Report – Paul Liburd

After over 24 years as a professional dancer in various companies in the UK, and having toured the world extensively as a performer, I retired from performing in 2011/12 and undertook a teaching qualification with the British Ballet Organization.

One of my first projects following my performing career was to demonstrate the Cohan method of the Graham technique for research at the Middlesex University, London. This was later re-visited and documented by Professor Christopher Bannerman, Head of ResCen Research Centre at Middlesex University, and Anne (Went) Donnelly, Associate Professor and Robert Cohan dance specialist, following a trip in 2013 to the Beijing Dance Academy in China, accompanied by Robert Cohan as teacher and myself demonstrating his methods. This is now viewable online at the ResCen website.

I was first introduced to the Graham technique in my early years of training at London School of Contemporary Dance, taught by Robert Cohan, Jane Dudley, Juliet Fisher and Christel Wallin. I found back then and still today do experience the magic and intriguing possibilities in this technique/style, with the use of physical-architecture, nature, human experiences and clarity combined.

My research project took me to the USA, for two weeks during the Easter break from Rambert school, thanks to the invitation of Janet Eilber, Artistic Director of the Martha Graham Dance Company. The aim of the two week visit was to observe the technical material being taught and approaches to its delivery, in order to develop and inspire my teaching practice of the Graham based work here in the UK.

My first port of call on week one was Westbeth on Bethune Street in the Meat Packing District of Manhattan, home of Graham, housing Martha Graham Company, Graham 2 and The Martha Graham School. Westbeth is the largest artist community in the United States that provides affordable live/work spaces for artists and their families. It was also the former home of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

The aims of the classes observed were to promote and develop the dancers/artists appreciation of the work; musicality, self-expression, style, clarity, stamina, core power and physical structure of the movement, both stationary and through the space.

I had the opportunity to see a combination of ten Graham teachers deliver classes, some of whom I managed to see multiple times as the timetables permitted. All classes rooted richly in the Graham vocabulary, full of artistic individuality and expression with deep core stimulation to drive the movement. Each teacher had their own nuances of the work as they all worked with Graham herself at different stages of her development of her choreographic creations and the technique subsequently. Hearing delicate and graphic words of imagery conjured up artistic performance, stylistic quality to the work both in classes and rehearsals of the main company and Graham 2; wonderful to witness life being injected into movement.



Graham Company Dancer, Laurel Dalley-Smith with Darshan Singh Bhuller after morning class.



Martha Graham Dance

There were long forgotten elements of the Graham technique that I had not seen since my contemporary training days at LSCD at The Place, elements that I can now incorporate into my work in some form, from time to time, now that I have been reminded and re-introduced to them. The work is multi-layered, so watching and listening to some beginners' classes was very beneficial. As a teacher, I now find it important to develop my vocabulary, aiming to keep the technique solid and codified but also broad enough to explore with my students. I saw so many possibilities within the work and also the structure of the class allowing shift and deep concentration at times.

On my weekend I took myself down to Charlotte North Carolina to see a former colleague, Hope Muir, now Artistic Director of Charlotte Ballet. I flew down late Friday and was able to see a couple of performances; the first, Charlotte Symphony and Charlotte Ballet performing Balanchine's *Apollo* and *Rite of Spring* Re-invented by Peter Chu. Then on Sunday I was able to watch an eclectic performance of community work, all part of the Charlotte Dance Festival 2018.

A short weekend but wonderful to support and see the work in North Carolina: Monday morning and an early cab at 5.00am to the airport and back up to New York. I landed at Newark, travelled back to Manhattan and into the Graham studios for week 2.

This week the Martha Graham Company moved into City Centre and rehearsals were starting to notch up. Choreographer Lar Lubovitch is in the studio. He has new work that will be premiered later on in the week. It was an honour for me to watch another legend at work creating, tweaking and putting the final touches to his work.

The Graham 2 Company was also rehearsing for their end of year shows in June; **Nocturne** by Bertram Ross and **Diversion of Angels**, another masterpiece by Graham. The school and the junior company both start learning some of Graham's repertoire before the main company, allowing them to immerse and refine the choreography and style.

I had the honour and privilege of spending a day at both Ailey and Juilliard Schools. Both schools were exceptional with their teaching staff, talented students and facilities. The enthusiasm from these two schools was infectious, a real joy to witness and truly inspiring. Darshan Singh Bhuller, a former colleague of mine from London Contemporary Dance Theatre, is one of this year's choreographers at The Ailey School, so I had the opportunity to sit in on rehearsals. His work highlighted the talent and breadth of this class of Ailey students in their last months of training.



Darshan Singh Bhuller & Paul Liburd - after rehearsal at The Ailey School.



Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre NYC.



The Juilliard School NYC.

On my last Friday/Saturday, I had the opportunity and privilege of seeing the Martha Graham Dance Company perform at City Centre. I managed to witness iconic Graham works such as **Chronicle**, **The Rite of Spring** and **Embattled Garden**: The re-imagined **Ekstasis** by Virginie Mécène, **Panorama** reconstructed by Yuriko, also new works by Lucinda Childs, Lar Lubovitch and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.

This was a real treat to see this company perform live for my first time. I take with me the drama, depth and physical embodiment of the Graham works by this talented and passionate company.



Places, people and organizations visited.

Martha Graham
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre
The Juilliard School
Charlotte Ballet
Janet Eilber (Artistic Director Martha Graham Company)
Melanie Person (Co-Director Ailey School)
Emily Hein (Ailey/Fordham BFA Program Administrator)
Hope Muir (Artistic Director Charlotte Ballet)
Nancy Duncan (Former Artistic Director London Contemporary Dance Theatre)
Jennifer Patten (Head of School - Martha Graham School)
Denise Vale (Senior Artistic Associate Martha Graham Company)
Darshan Singh Bhuller (Former LCDT dancer and guest teacher at Graham School/Ailey School)
Joyce Herring (Former Graham dancer/Graham teacher Martha Graham School)
Lone K. Larsen (Former Graham dancer/Program Director Martha Graham School)
Virginie Mécene (Former Graham dancer/Director of Graham 2/Program Director Martha Graham School)
Caridad Martinez (Ballet teacher Ailey School)
Kevin Predmore (Former Graham dancer/Graham teacher at Ailey)
Michael Leon Thomas (Former dancer Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre/Ailey Style teacher Ailey school)
Espen Giljane (Ballet teacher The Juilliard School)
Terese Capucilli (Former Graham dancer/Graham teacher at The Juilliard School)
Susan Kikuchi (Former Graham dancer/Graham teacher Martha Graham School)
Tadej Brdnik (Former Graham dancer/Director of Teens at Graham)
Miki Orihara (Former Graham dancer/Graham teacher Martha Graham School)

The most appreciation and thanks to Robert Cohan, Antonia Franceschi and Darshan Singh Bhuller for sounding-out and making the initial introductions to the Company and Schools prior to my arrival in the United States.