

Covering letter to LUTSF

13th July 2005

Dear Chair of LUTSF

Conference of the Society of Dance History Scholars.

4-14 June 2005, Chicago Illinois

Please find enclosed two copies of my report and a CD-R from my trip to chair at the conference of the Society of Dance History Scholars. I am very grateful that my project has been supported by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund. Without this support it would have been very difficult for me to attend the conference.

The project has been very successful as I was not only able to attend an international conference, but I had the opportunity to chair a session panel at the conference. It is very important to establish relations with overseas universities as it challenges one's perception of research and methodologies.

I certainly will recommend the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund to other dance scholars. It is an invaluable asset to have this experience which will be beneficial for my further academic career.

Yours sincerely

Thomas Hecht, MA, MA

Report

Introduction

Currently, I am conducting doctoral research in dance at London Contemporary Dance School and I am keen on an academic career. Thus, attending national *and* international conferences represent an essential part to achieve my goal.

In February 2004, I was invited to chair a panel at the conference of the Society of Dance History Scholars in Chicago in June 2004. I certainly did not want to miss out to establish professional and academic relationships with dance educators and dance historians in the United States. LUTSF gave me the opportunity to attend the conference which would not have been possible without this support.

Chicago

Prior to the conference, I spent five days at Chicago where I explored highlights of the 'Windy City' such as the Navy Pier, the Magnificent Mile, the lake front and the Museum of Modern Art. In 1871, the 'Great Chicago Fire' destroyed 17,000 buildings, allegedly the fire started by a cow kicking over a lantern. However, the opportunity to re-build and re-structure a city attracted many architects from all over the world and in 1885, the first – nine stories – skyscraper was built. In the new millennium, Chicago has the reputation of being a big, sophisticated city with small town hospitality. And that is exactly how I perceived the Midwest's largest city.

Conference of the Society of Dance History Scholars

The conference took place at the campus of Northwestern University in Evanston which is approximately 40 minutes from downtown Chicago. The conference opening was on Thursday evening but many delegates arrived on Friday. I found it very stimulating to be on an US campus and to 'breathe' different structures of dance education within this community. My doctoral research is focused on ballet and dance education, hence I attempted to go to all ballet papers that were presented at the conference, although it was sometimes very difficult to decide. The first paper (Norma Sue Fisher-Stitt) explored ballet in Canada from 1949 to 1959 and its increasing marginalization from a geographical, social and cultural perspective. This was followed by a paper on creative processes in ballet which was very interesting for me as I had led a dance laboratory with a similar focus in the previous year in London.

In the afternoon, I had the chance to meet Ann Nugent from University College of Chichester, UK, who presented her research on deconstructive practices of William Forsythe. It was very encouraging. Having a European colleague at the conference showed me the importance of international conferences for dance research as much US research is based on cultural and historical studies of dance, while the UK tends more and more to investigate dance practice as research.

In the late afternoon, I attended two paper presentations of postgraduate students from the University of Riverside in California which offers a PhD programme in Dance History and Theory. I had visited the Riverside campus in 2003 and also attended several seminars, and therefore I was very interested in these presentations to learn more about research papers of US postgraduate students. The evening ended – very late – with a concert with choreographic works based on ethnographic research by Reggie Wilson, Rebecca Rossen and Meida Villafana-McNeal. In line with the main theme of the conference 'centering dance', I was able to centre myself within this stimulating community of dance artists, researchers and practitioners.

A publication workshop, convened by Ann Cooper Albright, on Saturday was extremely helpful and gave insights into the difficult process of getting academic research published. This was particularly in regard to make the step from being a doctoral student into the academic world of dance publications. A highlight of the day for me was the meeting of the working group of doctoral strategies in dance education. It was very helpful to learn more about US doctoral dance education as the model of teaching largely

differs from UK models. The main differences are the taught elements of the US programmes. It challenged my perception of doctorates in the United States and it has strengthened my aim to work as a dance researcher in the United States once I have finished my doctorate in London.

The last day was very short but intense. I was somehow nervous on Sunday morning, as I had to chair a panel entitled 'Centering Men'. I had met the presenters the day before and it was particularly interesting for me to be responsible for a smooth running of my panel. Indeed, it went very well and we had a fruitful discussion about 'centered men' in dance.

Conclusion

It is incredible how fast the time passes when one is abroad. The trip to Chicago allowed me to fully achieve my objectives to challenge my research practice and to network in an international environment. I have greatly benefited from being in an international research atmosphere. The conference also encouraged me to submit more papers to International conferences and I have been accepted to present a paper at the IPP conference in Mainz (Germany) in August and at the Arts and Humanities Conference in Hawaii in January 2006 where I will present the findings of my pilot research of my doctorate. I also made contacts with UK institutions at the conference which, hopefully, will lead to some teaching hours.