

## LUTSF Report

Cornwall to Reykjavik Iceland: May 26<sup>th</sup> – June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024

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The purpose of my visit to Iceland was to seek enrichment and inspiration by taking in the landscape and taking part in local dance opportunities. I wanted to connect with dance artists who like me, work and live in a rural, landscape surrounded by sea and enrich my own physical practice, find new inspirations, learn how local dancers find and sustain theirs. As Dance Centred are developing Sea Dances, a new creative project, I was also interested to see if there might be some inspiration for it and connections that I could create for this project. Also as an older dance artist it feels particularly important to keep evolving and discovering, to keep my own practice fresh and alive to the world around me. Placing myself in new situations and cultures gave me an opportunity to do this.

My hosts for the trip were Dance Artist and teacher River Carmault and Dansverkstaedid. River works internationally as a dancer with Punch Drunk and is based in Iceland, he also teaches Technique, Choreography and Rep at Listdansskoli Reykjavik. Dansverkstaedid are a studio which are supported by private earned income and some local subsidy. Their aim is to support the free-lance dance sector with their training and space and opportunities to develop their own creative practice. I was keen to find how they build community within the sector, sustain inspiration and frame their offer and link artists to it.

In dialogue with River I learned more about the training opportunities for dancers locally. As creative and performing arts in education is in decline in the UK due to a devaluing of its role in life and the cuts within the education system, it was heartening to see the value placed on it in Iceland. Young people can select from a range of courses offering 3 year programme 16 – 19 year olds to study dance.

I was there to amongst other things, take part in the Dansdagur Festival 2024. This festival is co run by [Dansverkstaedid](#) and [Icelandic Dance Company](#). The Dansdagur Festival offers a weeklong programme of a range of dance styles and approaches, along with 2 platform events. On my first day I went to watch a class held in the local swimming called Sundballett Exorcism led by Erna Ómarsdóttir. It was interesting to see how accepting the public were of this unusual event in their pool and great to see what a sociable place the open-air pools are, how wonderful for dancers bodies to have access to saunas, jacuzzies, steam rooms etc for very little money and all over town. I attended a range of workshops including morning class run by ex-member of the Icelandic Dance Company, Hanness Por Egilsson. The space was buzzing, with around 30 dancers, mostly age 20 – 30 years, giving everything to the session.

I also attended sessions led by German artist Liina Magnea:

1. Family constellation therapy and panic dance - “to encourage an immediate and unmediated physical expression. The dance becomes a chance for the body to “panic” or react spontaneously without the filter of structured choreography or preconceived movements ideas”.
2. A 3-hour long dance piece on a fictive stage: This was a guided creative exploration of narratives and alter egos, through writing performing, witnessing and dance.

This was a challenging and brilliant day of work led by a wonderful artist. I had seen her perform the night before and this fed into being able to engage in her session. This day left me with new ideas to feed into my work. After the sessions I spent time at the dance space chatting to other dancers, finding out about the funding system, the challenges of being freelance, where they get support and training. It seems my host organisation Dansverkstaedid, are the main support for the freelance world. They work incredibly hard to sustain the dance space and offer a supportive programme at low prices. Freelancers can have a membership and get sessions and space very cheap or free, they also rent their spaces to other dance and activity teachers in the community. It feels there is some separation between the freelance community and the main funded

Icelandic Dance Company with regards to funding balance and Dansverkstaedid is working to redress that balance. I met a choreographer who feels she is more part of an underground movement of gender diversity and disability, she feels although attitudes are quite open in the public community, the work still isn't part of the main stream. Also funding often doesn't recognise the complexities of being a disabled artist.

Over three evenings I attended 2 Open Stage platforms and a mixed form Dance Battle, all held in the large and beautiful theatre where the Icelandic Dance Company perform, called Borgarleikhus. The Open Stage events were similar to work I have presented at home and they promoted new work and work in progress made by the freelance dance community and work by two interns working with the Icelandic Dance Company. The commonality of work shown differed in some ways to the work in our dance platforms in Cornwall, there was a bolder more raw expression amongst the predominantly young dance artists. I feel the UK is more evolved in the range of people who are making and performing, where this felt predominantly by the young for the young. The Dance Battle was a beautiful event of energy and joy hosted by The Ice Crew. Dancers of different styles were invited to "battle" in a fun and supportive atmosphere and a good crowd was gathered. I was surprised by how few were in the audience for the Open Stage events, which to me seemed extraordinary for the high quality of the work shown and such a waste. At home we are having to prove our existence so much that we have to work so hard to make everything a "success". After talking to the platform hosts, they would have liked a few more, but felt no threat to their work and survival as a result of the low numbers. If I was running a similar event I would want an audience for the dancers involved, but they seemed quite unfazed by the low numbers. The marketing and engagement methods were far less rigorous and imaginative compared to what would be expected of us, also although the Icelandic Dance Company were a partner in this festival they didn't seem to promote anything about it on their socials. There were efforts to reach a wider dance community with artist talks and walks but these were less successful. Again I think the community is at an early stage in reaching this demographic and marketing techniques will need to change to reach them. The Open Stage and Dance Battle was placed in a beautiful large theatre venue and this all seemed to be taken for granted and very low key. None of the dancers were paid to perform, most of the dancers have to make a living in other ways.

I loosely chatted to dancers about our project Sea Dances. In it we will be inviting dancers to respond to the questions "How does the sea move you and how do you see the sea move?". I felt that there was so much going on in the week, that this wasn't the place to force the connections for this, but just make links that I can pursue after my visit. There was interest in the ideas and the question. There were many dancers from different nationalities that I met working in the Icelandic Dance Company, but also many Icelandic dancers feel they have to leave Iceland to get performance opportunities. It seems there was some feeling that priority of funding was given to those who stayed and trained locally, rather than to those who left to train in another country. It turns out I was the festival's first international attendee and they were thrilled I was there. Whilst here I also travelled inland and to the sea and attended dance, music and visual arts events at the Reykjavik Arts Festival (great to see dance placed well in the programme) and The Festival of the Sea which was taking place in galleries, concert halls, museums, the harbour and other spaces in and around Reykjavik.

#### **My main take homes are:**

- The commonality between Dansverkstaedid and Dance Centred and other organisations in the UK, who are working so hard to support the free-lance dance sector to have opportunities to develop their work, and how important this work is.
- The hunger and desire to make work and perform by a generation of young dancers deeply affected by Covid.
- How exciting that Dansverkstaedid are carving a new sense of belonging and community for dance in Iceland. I sat next to a dancer who told me "this feels like the beginning of something, I am beginning to feel part of a dance community".
- How lovely to be able to travel in such a safe feeling country and what an extraordinary landscape.

- What a wonderful opportunity I had to spend time with new and inspiring teachers and artists in particular spending time with River Carmault and the day with performance artist [Liina Magnea](#)

**What will I do as a result of this trip?:**

- Embed some of the creative ideas from workshops into my own work.
- Continue to support the freelance dance sector with renewed energy, particularly to make and perform their work.
- Share about this trip in the Dance Centred newsletter and on Dance Centred Socials and with the Sea Dance team.
- Write a letter of support for Dansverkstaedid and their work, to the local council who fund them.
- Build on connections made for Sea Dances, creative exchange and ongoing dialogue
- Encourage others to apply to LUTSF.
- Continue to risk new experiences.

It seems that I need to learn to land more lightly after my leaps into the air, as the tectonic plates shifted whilst I was there and a new seam in the volcano close to Reykjavik erupted, throwing molten lava into the air. I thought this was a good metaphor for the shifting landscapes of the body and mind and the power of dance to transform the world!