



WHY INITIATE CHOREOSOUND? DRIVING FORCES AND TRIGGER POINTS

by Marika Hedemyr

The initiator of Choreosound 09 is Marika Hedemyr, a well-known choreographer and Choreosound's artistic director. She shares her experiences of arranging such a large international project. Marika Hedemyr describes the need for proper funding and building a good working relationship with the funding agencies. But her professional and personal passion for choreography, composing, dance and music is her true driving force.

My initial driving force, the one which led to Choreosound 09, was an urge to challenge and develop my own working methods for composition, the relationship between contemporary dance and music, and the forms for collaboration with composers. I was also concerned with finding a way to combine working in Gothenburg, where I am currently based, while still continuing my international collaborations. The idea of a lab came up early, an artistic lab that focuses on the process of composing contemporary dance and music. A meeting between dance and music, choreographers and composers. I kept the idea on the backburner for a couple of years, talking to interesting people and partners. In 2008, an opportunity came up to arrange the lab in 2009 in connection with the Listen to the World festival, and with Region Västra Götaland as a co-producer. What a fantastic break! I started the planning and fundraising in the early summer 2008. We also set up a reference group with representatives from the Crowd Company, Danskotoret and Open.

I was designing a lab that I wanted to take part in myself, but hadn't found anywhere. If it didn't exist, I figured I'd better make it. I was fortunate to get proper funding for the project. This allowed me to engage an experienced project manager, Anna Tarschys. She started in February 2009, when the implementation phase of the project got going. I had a great time planning activities, formulating questions and issues, contacting people and outlining the form of the lab. In my mind, I would be on the floor in the studio exploring this at the lab week. During the planning stage, I would be Artistic Director, but when it started, I would be one of the participants. The project had grown and we were expecting

60 artists coming as either participants or by giving seminars or master classes. Somewhere by March 2009 I realized that there were a lot of issues, decisions and coordination aspects at an artistic level that had to be taken care of by someone



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while the lab was actually taking place. I looked around – who was this someone?

It was an extremely difficult decision to make, but I finally came to the conclusion that this “someone” was me. My driving force to create the project was to be able to take part in the lab myself. So without that, what would keep me motivated? I had a few weeks of really hard rethinking. Now, afterwards, I’m very pleased with my decision. If I had been in the studio as a choreographer during the lab, I probably would have been torn between my own artistic process and the artistic directorship, seriously risking not being happy with the achievements in either department. In hindsight, going for only one role was a wise decision. During the course of the project, I could focus fully on being an artistic director, thanks to the fantastic project staff that took care of all the practical planning, logistics and implementations. And that was a fantastic experience in itself.

So how did I go about it all? I defined five core issues for Choreosound 09 that were to be explored. I wanted to invite colleagues to discuss, develop and work with these issues. I contacted people that I thought had something to say about the issues, or had interesting experience, and asked if they would like to share their perspectives with us. It gave me an opportunity to contact people I didn’t know, or hadn’t even heard of before. A lot of them were interested, but unfortunately, some were already booked during the week of the lab. The five core issues were:

- What relation do dance and music have towards each other in a performance?
- Which working methods and collaboration processes are used when a choreographer and composer collaborate? Is it possible to name them and describe them?
- Are there certain elements in music that choreographers and dancers choose to work with? Likewise, are there certain elements in dance that composers and musicians choose to work with?
- It seems to be a general opinion among composers, that there are less collaborations between music and dance today, compared to 10 – 15 years ago. What are the reasons for this?
- What happens in the collaborations of contemporary dance and contemporary music today? Are there any trends?

Some people asked “Why music and dance? Isn’t that old school?” With regard to certain styles or certain ways of relating to music and dance, I would say yes. But the fact remains that music and sound figure into almost all dance performances – the need for collaboration and a relationship of some manner is still there. So why not join forces to explore and challenge this relationship between music and dance.

Another important aspect was to start from driving forces and trigger points. When we were looking for associates to help us organize this project, this mindset was the most important factor in selecting staff and volunteers. This goes for the participants as well. If Choreosound triggered a person’s driving forces, then Choreosound was the right project for them, and the person was right for Choreosound. This ultimately meant that the proper motivation and dedication was there, and we ended up with a fantastic project team as well as a fantastic group of participants.

So how was the setup for the week? I wanted to design a lab where everyone had a specific role as choreographer, composer, dancer, or musician. In reality, many freelance artists work as both choreographer and dancer, or as both composer and musician. This was also the case for the participants that came to Gothenburg. But I was not interested in a discussion of what each person is in terms of labeling their profession, or hosting a lab where everyone does a bit of everything. This time, I was interested in creating a lab situation where each person could embody a single role, and from that perspective, explore the core issues. That is why I wanted to include master classes given by individuals who were not already present as participants, thus providing a unique perspective, input and task for the working session of the afternoon. The choreographers and composers were invited by personal invitation. The dancers and musicians sent in applications, and were selected by the reference group.

I was shooting for a broad spectrum of representation within the genre of contemporary dance and music. However we – the reference group and I – made a choice to stick mainly with what is regarded as Western contemporary dance and music, and to use professionals. We also decided to stick to artists who mainly work with composition, not improvisation. By improvisation I mean improvisation as art form for performances, not improvisation as tool. When selecting the dance participants, we looked for choreographers who worked with dance theatre, formalistic, conceptual, or cross-disciplinary. In music, we looked for composers who worked with notated music, symphonic music, electronica, conceptual, sound art or pop.

Likewise, the choice of master classes were to represent different perspectives in order to be inspired – or provoked – by someone who might work in a completely different way than yourself. I invited people who had extensive experience of choreographer – composer collaborations, but who represented different styles, genres or perspectives: Charo Calvo, a composer, shared her experience on working with electronica /sound and music for dance and film. Cecilia Roos, a dancer and Professor of Dance Interpretation, gave a master class on interpretation highlighting the different understanding of interpretation in dance and music. Sven Da-

vid Sandström, a composer, shared his experience of writing notated orchestral pieces for dance. Nigel Charnock, a choreographer, gave a master class sharing his perspective of deliberately using existing recorded music/CDs. He also gave a physical dance class open to everyone in the project.

Another important aspect guiding my work was how to maximize creativity during the working sessions, allowing people to get inspired artistically. I guess there is no universal answer to this, but certain things appear to be important when arranging an intense lab with several different artists taking place during a rather short period of time. There should be transparency in the organization and as to how decisions are made. All staff should be introduced in person at the beginning. People should be invited and treated as unique individuals. It is important to establish an atmosphere of generosity and the freedom to express curiosity right from the start. Open source and sharing can spur generosity. In order to take risks and challenge yourself during the working sessions, it helps to have the surrounding circumstances well taken care of. That means sleeping well, preferably in a single room; having plenty of access to coffee/tea and good food, so you don't get hungry; technical staff helping out with technical issues; arrangements in place in the event of injuries, in terms of physiotherapists (especially important for dancers). In other words, to enable getting out of the comfort zone during the sessions, it certainly helps to be comfortable with your surroundings.

One week before everyone came to Gothenburg, I sent an e-mail asking all participants to formulate their driving forces and trigger points. Starting a discussion in exchanging driving forces is much more interesting than lining up merits from a CV. Fruitful collaborations often start when you click with someone in terms of driving forces, trigger points, or preferences. I asked the participants to formulate the answers for themselves and have them in mind during the lab. The questions were:

- Why have you chosen to work as dancer/choreographer/ musician / composer? What are your trigger points and your driving forces in this regard?
- What is special about the specific genre/style/technique/instrument you work with? Why did you choose it? Or did it choose you?
- What is it in the meeting between music and dance that interests and/or intrigues you?
- What do these words/concepts mean to you in your daily work: Composition? Form? Compositional idea? Structure?

- If you contextualize your work and/or your preferences, how would you describe it/them? By this we mean referencing to colors, films, books, authors, choreographers, composers, directors, architecture, feelings, smell, sound, objects etc.

Choreosound 09 was a fascinating project in many respects. I went on a journey, not the one I expected maybe, but it turned out to be a truly interesting one. In addition to the content explored via the core issues, Choreosound 09 also created a network among the participants. Today, six months later, several artistic collaborations are already in progress that involves people who met at Choreosound 09, including myself. This is great, because the long term aim of the lab is to spur us into new collaborations and new performances.

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Marika Hedemyr is educated at Laban Centre, London (1999). She creates dance theatre for stages and public locations. She finds inspiration in pedestrian movements, non verbal communication and challenges the borders as well as places for dance performances. She is often engaged in international projects on artistic practice.

Master Class, Marika Hedemyr in the foreground.



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