



REFLECTIONS FROM A CLASSICAL PIANIST

From: Kyriakos Spyrou [mailto:iubeus@hotmail.com]

Sent: October 22, 2009, 16:10

To: Marika Hedemyr

Subject: RE: Reflections – Theme and Core Issues Choreosound 09

Dear Mrs Hedemyr,

To begin with, it is obvious to me that two worlds were present throughout the workshop: the musicians' world and the dancers' world. Not only the artistic output was different – instruments on the one hand, moving bodies on the other – but also the general behaviour and character: The dancers, for example, were in general more health-conscious than the musicians, so during a break you would normally find most of the musicians outside smoking, while the dancers were inside, eating fruit. These two groups of people had a different awareness of their bodies and of what a performance is. It is true that there were similarities and meeting points between the two groups, such as love for art, creative minds that produce ideas, and sensitivity to detail. Nevertheless, these two worlds were still fundamentally separate.

In order for a collaboration to take place in working sessions, communication had to take place. There had to be some mutual understanding of what we were doing, what the task was. It was like asking two people who speak different languages to describe a painting to one another. This communication (when it happened) was achieved through the conversations between the choreographer and the composer. Since the "language" was different, other means were used to communicate thoughts and ideas: They spoke of colours, shapes, abstract ideas (like evolving, falling, protecting, growing and so on), texts, scenarios that formed a background (many "she's" and "he's" came up during the sessions, with their individual character and story), acoustics, psychology and more. By talking abstractly about the "piece", the parties involved somehow managed to bridge the gap between their worlds, and a certain balance would emerge from that process.

Thus the choreographer and the composer were the rule-setters of the working session. They would set up a "game", a system of rules that the performers had to follow. Most of the time, this created the impression of an experimental game, where anything could happen in well-orchestrated randomness. As a musician, I found myself trying to negotiate this balance while being a part of a running mechanism. My creativity had to kick in and help me with the role I had to play, while at the same time I had to follow the directions of my composer. Also, I had to have my ears and eyes wide open for signals in the performing space, in order to keep the performance "experiment" running in a harmonious way, and not interrupting the balance. This very balance might have been compromised by the rule-setters as part of an artistic decision. When that happened, a chaos occurred, where my deepest knowledge, inherited from years of classical training, would emerge. I had to transform this knowledge into something that would fit into the whole context of the performance, or the aesthetic balance would be lost.

In other words, I felt as if I were part of a living entity that could be called "Performing with other people, but under



Gunbild Seim, Anders Rimpi and Kiriakos Spyrou during a working session.

PHOTO: MALIN ARBERSSON

restrictions". Feelings like commitment and responsibility came up. At the same time, I felt I was being judged by the others, though my co-participants were great people and would never say anything bad about my playing. It is part of performing in front of people, I guess. I'm sure these feelings were more or less shared by the others, as well. That kept the performing group tied together in a way, forming the "living body" I mentioned earlier.

Music (and particularly the kind we had at the lab) doesn't have a clearcut meaning. I heard many choreographers during our lab saying to their dancers: "give the movement meaning", which to me meant something like: make your mind understand the movements of the body, and give them a context, a cause and a target. Thus the movements were comprehended both by the performer and the viewer. Music, on the other hand, could never have meaning in itself. Even if you gave music a cause (need for expression?) and a target (moving the audience?), the "meaning" would still remain pretty vague. But, when the context comes in, things work differently. I remember the piece Niels and Helena made, with the composer conducting the voices of the performers. The music of that piece was actually the words transformed into music. If you played that music on a CD to someone who had never seen the piece, it would be nonsense. It's the context that makes (musical) sound meaningful. Moreover, human movement - no matter how inhuman contemporary dance can make it - is a sight that the eyes are used to. It seems that we better understand a moving human body than a series of humanly generated tones (as in music). The successful combination of both can be a bearer of true meaning.

We saw many ways of collaborating demonstrated by the choreographers and composers. The choreographer might have an idea which the composer set to music. Or, the choreographer asked the composer to write music first, in order to be inspired. We also witnessed occasions where the composer took over, imposing his vision of the "piece" on the choreographer. Finally, there were also long talks between composer and choreographer, while trying to build something together. Sometimes the talk included the performers. These methods were as different as the personalities involved.

If our lab was a representation of what is really happening in the dance world today, then it seems to me that there are indeed some trends. With regard to music, we have a decisive turn towards electronic and electro acoustic music, along with the use of live electronics. This kind of music provides the choreographer with airy soundscapes on which he/she can "paint". It is also much more inexpensive than hiring musicians to play your piece. Actually, the use of pre-recorded music in rehearsals and performances is common. Some people even use no music at all! As far as musicians

are concerned, they prefer contemporary dance to modern or classical. Contemporary art embraces all music genres and musicians from many different backgrounds. That's why we musicians managed to survive this week, even though we were from different parts of the western-world musical continuum : A blues guitarist next to a jazz trumpet next to a folk accordion player next to a marimba player who adored Steve Reich... Get the picture? That's the age we live in - contrasts are the rule. Many things that some years ago were unthinkable because of the great stylistic gap that divided them, is the norm today. This fragmentation of ideas, images and context was evident in our lab work. As an example, one can state the piece by Daniel and Stephanie where a dancer used a microphone and said "This is a structure". This piece survived the summing-ups and the last performance, although it was utterly chopped up into contrasting pieces, because our post-modern, shattered minds managed to put the pieces back together in a harmonious way. That has to be the way we think nowadays. We like discontinuity, mismatches, fear, mystery, noise. No, we don't like them, but we've learned to extract pleasure from them.

This workshop has been an example of how many people, all very different from each other, can (try to) work together and produce something. Obviously, the greatest product of this workshop was not the final performance at the theatre, but all these thoughts and afterthoughts that have been generated. I can't speak for everyone but to me, Choreosound was a unique experience. It has changed the way I understand art in general and has helped me tremendously with my creative processes. I brought back home a great load of information and experiences, which I now share with colleagues and friends. I do hope something similar will be repeated in the future, so that even more young people can get the chance to experiment, learn and evolve like all of us who attended Choreosound 09 did.

I have attached this text to this e-mail as well, for your convenience. Once again, thank you for giving me the chance to take part in such a great gathering of people! I wish you all the best.

Yours truly,
Kiriakos Spyrou

Kiriakos is from Limassol, Cyprus, and he has studied music in Athens, Greece (BA in Musicology at the University of Athens, piano, counterpoint, fugue). Since January he is studying Composition.

He has a love for performing and collaborating with other artists, along with an acute curiosity about what the future holds for artists.