

TALK /

SNDO 1982–2006 online

I have no idea,
but I think
all my
favourite people
have been
skipped over
by dance
historians.

Just before Judson / Early Revolutions

Jaap Flier and Remy Charlip / interviewed by Sally Summers and Lisa Kraus

In a discussion panel at the SNDO in 1989, Sally Summers and Lisa Kraus ask questions to Jaap Flier, former soloist and artistic director of the Nederlands Danstheater, and Remy Charlip, choreographer and former dancer with Merce Cunningham. They discuss their first collaboration together in Australia, when Charlip made the airmail dance, developments in New York at the end of the 1950s, prior to the Judson period and how they were linked to the Dutch dance scene, through the work of James Waring, Glen Tetly for the Nederlands Danstheater. About the excitement of doing wild, crazy and wonderful things, you never know what was going to happen.

Question (Q) / Where did you two meet?

JF / In Paris.

RC / I was doing *Harlequin* at the time, making the paintings.

JF / Someone said to me, "I know someone you would like very much." And I asked whether he was a dancer and he said, "No, he is a painter, I'd like you to meet him." That's when he introduced us.

RC / It was some time between 1970 and 1974.

JF / The first working relationship with Remy was in Australia. I tried also, when I was directing the Nederlands Danstheater (NDT), to ask Remy but...

RC / It was one of the reasons you got fired at the NDT.

JF / You're right, that was one of the reasons... We had a committee of dancers who were controlling me.

2

Q / A committee of dancers? That's different. Usually your committees have nothing to do with dance.

JF / Well, that was a daily board, more or less. Every suggestion I did was controlled by that board. So when I wanted to introduce Remy to the company, the board thought it wouldn't fit into our repertoire. So I was not able to ask him. But as soon as I was in Australia, I wrote a letter to him, whether he wanted to come. And he came from Venezuela and forgot his yellow fever certificate...

RC / I didn't forget it, I left it at home, because I was trying to make everything much lighter, and I had it for seven years – it was good for nine years – and nobody had ever asked me for it. I had put it away in a special little place at home. They put me into quarantine.

Q / You were in quarantine in Australia?

RC / Well, they took me off the plane and they said, "Where did you come from?" and I said, "Venezuela." If I had said San Francisco it would have been all right. I asked Jaap what to do and he said that the best thing to do was to go into quarantine, and wait. There's a five-day period before you start showing the disease. So I got a rest and Russell sent fish and wines, and everything. That was actually quite wonderful. There were two nurses and seven caretakers taking care of me. You're supposed to be locked up in this place with screens, but there were no screens. That's when I sent the first *airmail dance* out into the company, to do as a group piece.

Q / The genesis of the *airmail dance*?

RC / I did these drawings and I said, "Here is this dance."

JF / We just got a package of pieces of paper with all figures on it and it said, "go ahead", so we gave all the dancers those papers and said, "Well, you all make your solo." It was astonishing for them; they didn't know what to do with it.

Q / Do you remember what year this was?

RC / It was 1976. I remember it because it was the American celebration...and that was interesting because there would be these interviews over the telephone with me about "How does it feel to be an American, and to be put in jail." There were headlines in the newspaper, "Choreography by Remote Control." There were telephone interviews which were later shown on

TV with my voice-over... The first time I saw the dancers on television, they were working on it. They'd interview me and say things like, "How do you feel about the Australian government putting you into jail?" I'd say, "Well, they've helped create a new art form." The other thing was "If they're making the dance themselves what are you doing, Mr. Charlip?" "Oh, I'm just like a traffic director, just to see that they don't bump. Unless they want to bump, you know." And when I arrived in the studio, I felt I could go home. They had all done solos. They had those slips of paper and cut them out. Some of them were on the windows, so they could see through them backwards, some were along the walls. They were everywhere. And everybody was doing these dances. Then all I did, with Jaap and Willy de la Bije, was guiding them... We'd see some poor little dancer sitting in a corner looking miserable, and we'd say to her, "Why don't you go over there and work with her?" That's how we did the duets. Then we did duets and trios.

JF / It was nice because we worked in a part of Sydney, which was called Wooloomoolo. That's an aboriginal name.

RC / It means watering place, or meeting place.

JF / So he called it *Wooloomoolo Cuddle*.

Q / What was your relationship with James Waring and what do you think of him as an artist, and an innovator? Describe, if you can, something about him and his work.

3

JF / As far as I know about it, I can try. I met him first at the NDT, because he was invited by Glen Tetley to do a piece, and I think the reason why Glen Tetley invited him was because he had seen pieces in Judson Church and he had heard about "Jimmy," that is James Waring. Somehow it seemed they thought he was making connections between a more established company and a world which was more avant-garde, experimental, the whole Judson movement. They asked him for that reason, actually. They wanted him to make a connection between the ideas he worked on in America and the NDT, which had close connections to America, but was a much more traditional company. I think Waring was the right person, to make that connection, because as far as I know him, he had all kinds of connections in dance. They asked him to do a piece called *Purple Moment*, which, I think, was already performed in America. It was kind of a vaudeville piece. I remember that the beginning of the piece was in front of the curtain. People were dressed in, I think, 1920, 1930 fashion coming in front of the curtain, bottles of champagne on a table, glasses. The amazing thing is that he mixed a lot of 1920s elements, bits of classical ballet and also modern dance elements. It was a piece that went through some parts of history. It was a dance with samba, waltz, maracas, and the girl was dressed in a beautiful dress he had made himself.

RC / He made all the costumes.

JF / Yes, he made a lot of the costumes himself. He was working on them for days. He was a man with a lot of ideas about detail. I would describe him as a magician. He had a very tall body, he was very thin, a very thin face, his hair was quite straight and he always had a little smile. His lips were always a bit up. And long, long fingers, a very esoteric person.

RC / He almost looked like Nosferatu, you know, the original Dracula figure.

JF / Yes, a bit Dracula, right.

RC / In America he actually played Dracula in Katy Litz' piece. He was Dracula.

JF / His way of talking was sometimes precious, but always very colorful, but right to detail. That was the wonderful thing in *Purple Moment*. Already the name explains something about it.

RC / His titles were always fabulous; just to read a list of his titles was like thinking of all kinds of incredible poetry. They were magical. *Three Thousand Butterflies Encountered on the Ocean*, that was one title.

He asked everybody and anybody to dance in his work. He met Toby Armour at Graham's and he said "Would you like to be in a dance?" She didn't know then, but in the end she came. He met David Gordon in Washington Square Park. David Gordon was sitting there doing his homework from Brooklyn College, under a streetlamp, and Waring came up to him and said, "Would you like to be in a piece?"

Q / Gordon hadn't done any dancing? He wasn't even part of that world.

RC / But he became a part of the world through Waring, and there were lots of people like that, whom he found. He was just a young boy. And he worked with people like Yvonne Rainer, and Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, and David Vaughan. Vaughan, Paul Taylor, Waring and me did a piece together, we collaborated on a group piece. We each did a little section.

Q / What year was that, do you remember?

RC / It was in the early 50s. He had a place called Dance Associates, I think that's the name, where people could make pieces. David Wong came over from London. Wong was part of the producing company, he was always in all the pieces, as was Eileen Passloff, a very important member of this company.

4

Q / How did you see Waring? I see him as a lynch pin figure, but how do you see that?

RC / Yes, in situations like that where he would bring ballet and modern dance together. He was also very interested in all kinds of gestures. So you might do a ballet step and then, in the middle of it, go yeughh! It was always very surprising, those little things, because they were totally unexpected. You know, you'd have someone up on points and suddenly they were going – like that. He would just put these little things in, it was always like a collage.

Q / Were you dancing with Merce Cunningham at that time?

RC / Yes, but I was also dancing with Katy Litz and several other people.

Q / Can you tell us something about Litz? I got to see some of her last performances at the church.

RC / She was extraordinary. She was in the original Humphrey/Weidman group, with Sybil Shearer. The pieces before that were unbelievable. She would do things like sit on a chair and pick cherries from a tree, or something like that. She is an astonishing performer, and did the most amazing pieces.

Q / So this whole vocabulary of pedestrian movement, everyday gestures, was something that these people were dealing with very, very early on...

RC / Yes, Cunningham and Shearer did a piece together in which they both wore overcoats. Litz and Shearer did a piece which was totally in the dark and they were bumping on the ground, then when they came in for curtain calls they came in putting their bathrobes on, because they did it in the nude. They were all doing these very wild and wonderful things. You never knew what was going to happen.

Q / What do you think provoked that line of investigation at that time? Do you think it was a rebellion against the style of mainstream modern dance, or do you think it was more a positive reaction, in that they were trying to find a larger vocabulary?

RC / I think they were very interested in the art world at the time too, you know, there was the Tenth Street Art Club, where De Kooning and Franz Kline and Motherwell and all those people met every Friday night, and there was a lecture. A lot of the work was very positive in that way, but there was also the reaction against Martha Graham, doing these very psychological

dances, and dances that were classical Greek myths and things like that. Balanchine did the White Ballets too, but they wanted to bring in more of the idea that anything is dancing. I think that is the revolution, that anything is dancing.

Q / How did Waring put stuff together?

RC / Jimmy was very prolific, to make an enormous number of pieces. Every concert was a whole concert of new pieces. I think in the same way that Cunningham worked, he was just putting one thing after another and believed that anything can follow anything else. Besides Dance Associates, he was very influential because he was the first person who had a choreography class. Before Bob Dunn and Judy Dunn did that workshop at Cunningham's which ended up at Judson, he was already teaching choreography classes in which the pieces were channeled into performance. I went to one of Bob Dunn's, because I had made a choreography myself, the *Crossword Puzzle dance*. I had given an existing crossword puzzle to a lot of people, with different colored squares and you had to find the person who had the color square to give you the movement. Everybody had their own score.

That very first summer group and they all had to dance to the same Satie piece, *The Three Spoons*. Simone Forti was actually the most fabulous. She would step and then bring her feet together, then she would step, step and put another part of the body down, like a hand. Four steps and then two parts of the body. It was so simple and so beautiful, the way she did it. And she did another piece in which she was watching an onion grow, in a glass, the way that the onion gradually... She watched it each day until it fell over, then she did a dance based on that.

5

RC / I didn't know Lisa, you were at that camp with James Waring. Tell us something about that.

LK / This was a camp called Indian Hill, that was in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and it was a summer camp for teenagers who wanted to practice the arts. The person who started it was a musician, and I remember, before breakfast, singing Renaissance madrigals, and having water ballets and drawing on the lawn. Jimmy Waring was the resident dance master. It was lush, and green, a lot of Jewish American princesses from Long Island. And I was a princess from Westchester. He would give ballet class every morning, which I hated, I had never done anything like it, and I was a fierce grand dancer from the age of 13. But something sunk in from that. In the afternoons he would work on pieces with us. And he would have us make our own work. He would give composition class. We did a lot with chance. He would have us do scores where he would give us duration and space, and then a quality of movement, lyric or percussive, sustained. You had to do – and this was something very radical he was presenting – the first thing that came into your mind. You could not change it, right? It was great, and it was torture. Because of course you didn't like what you did, it didn't follow along with what you thought dancing was supposed to be. If the first thing that came into your head was to slap your head, you were stuck with it.

When the summer was over, I had no idea what had happened to me. He had been taking us up to his room and reading from Gertrude Stein and he taught us how to throw the I Ching, and he would say things at dinner. You would be seated very quietly at dinner and he would lean forward and say to you, "You must never run, nothing is worth running for." And you'd kind of go, OK. It was funny, it was really wild. And he really ruined Graham for me. I started to study ballet after that.

Q / How did the Netherlands hear about this man, Waring?

JF / It was through an American, through Tetley.

Q / Do you think Tetley had seen the work?

JF / I think he had seen the work *Landscape* in 1970, 1971. Many people came to Judson, or were influenced by what happened there. I asked him back when I became artistic director of NDT.

I remember that at the time he came, we had difficulties in the company. He was looking around in the studio for a week. I said, "shouldn't you start working with the people?" He said, "I started already." Then he actually was choosing people, and looking what kind of strange movement they did daily. Like Russell was in the piece, Russell Dumas, and he had that strange whipping with his fingers. There was a girl, when she was talking with you she was always rubbing her hands and wrists. He was looking at all those people, what kinds of movement they did in their daily lives, and then after a week he started to work with those people. He only took these idiosyncratic movements, the first part of the Schoenberg piece was eight minutes, maybe ten, but the whole ten minutes, there were about nine people, they were only doing that one movement. They did it in a repetitive pattern. When they met each other, you got this strange situation, where it seemed that those two movements they had, that they started to make a connection, though they didn't make a connection at all.

I remember that one of the difficulties we had in the company was that I wanted the people to do more progressive work, modern work, and there was a whole riot against me because the dancers said, "we have not had a classical training to end up on bare feet." I told my sorrows to Waring. The second part of the piece Waring made was very classical, but in such an idiotic way, that although you recognized it, you didn't know whether it was satire, serious or nagging. That whole second part had quotations all the time, and actually there was also a lot of strange standing, like in anger, but in a very formal and directed way, more like dance than anger. It had all those double meanings, and I think it was a very beautiful piece, but of course it didn't exist longer than seven performances in the programme.

6

Q / What was the critical response to it?

JF / Oh, very strange. First of all, they didn't know the person very well, and then seeing this strange work, I actually had a feeling that they didn't know how to react. The overall response was not negative, but flat, totally flat. They didn't have the experience to look at things the way that Waring made them. I think that willingness to understand new things is very important to experience new things. Waring's work was tricky because he always did lead you into directions that seemed familiar, then he immediately took you away from that. He never gave you answers. That's very typical for what I remember...

Q / Everybody was taking classes at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School in the late 40s and the late 50s. Do you think he came in the late 40s to New York, from San Francisco?

RC / I don't remember about dates. Actually David Vaughan has, with a bunch of people, a lot of archives about Waring. They helped reconstruct certain dances. They had an exhibit of his work at the New York public library, at Lincoln Centre and they had some really beautiful photographs, and beautiful costumes. I don't know what his training was, but he made beautiful paintings and collages and the costumes were always beaded. Each bead was sewn on and there were thousands of them in green, then another row in red, then another row of orange, the most amazing things. And he'd make hats, big things like this, shoulders coming out, it was just astonishing.

Q / Why do you think he's been skipped over by dance historians?

RC / I have no idea, but I think all my favourite people have been skipped over by dance historians. I think some people are more political than others and able to get their names in the newspaper, or they have lovers who write in the newspapers, or they are able to get close to... I'm not trying to take any credit away from them, most of them are wonderful. But John Herbert MacDowell was one of my favourites and at Judson... he did the music for Waring too. He was a musician. He did pieces at Judson in which there were fifty people in white coming from the left and fifty people in red coming like this, and thirty people coming in black, and they'd all be doing their own movements, just as in Waring's pieces. They were all doing these weird things. I told you the other day about Alex Hay, that was one of my favourite pieces I've ever seen of Judson.

Q / Could you describe it?

RC / Well, there was a construction of pipes, like construction workers use. When you first were aware that something was happening there was this little figure left, a little sloth hanging upside down on a pipe. There was a tape that said, "Are you

comfortable?” and he would sort of squirm a little, like this, and move to another place and another position and lie back like this. Then the tape would say, “Are you comfortable?” and he would squirm and move to another place and the tape would say, “Are you comfortable?” That was the whole piece, but it was fabulous. A lot of artists, and he was an artist, not a dancer, made pieces together, like Bob Morris and Yvonne Rainer.

Q / How important do you think the influence was of the art world, particularly the sculptors to the things that were developed at Judson?

RC / Well, there was a time when there were lots of people who were involved in the happenings, like Alan Kaprow. Then there were individual people, but mostly painters actually... Claes Oldenberg did a lot of sculpting, but Jim Dine was a painter. Simone Forti married two sculptors, her names were Simone Morris, Simone Whitman, and now she's back to Simone Forti. Whitman made some pieces with dancers. The best piece I saw that they had done was Jim Dine's piece, where he was all dressed like a fat Buddha, he had a painting, and he started to paint with a brush and tip into it, and he started to paint this thing and it turned out to say “I love what I'm doing”. Then he threw the paint over himself, and he drank the paint...It was a wonderful piece, one of those one-time pieces. Claes had a show, in which he had all these creepy bums with the burnt edges, sculptures that he made, that was on the same programme as that other thing. So those were the main influences, besides Bob Rauschenberg, of course, who was very influential. He did the most beautiful costumes for Cunningham. I was with Cunningham for eleven years and then in '61 I left. And I did all of his costumes for nine years, before Rauschenberg took over.

7

Q / I remember the first time I saw you, it was in 1959 in Connecticut College, doing *Antic Meet*.

RC / That was a wonderful piece to do. I'll never forget the time that Steve Paxton took over my roles, he came into the company when I left, I taught them to him. I went to see a performance for the first time, to see what it was, and I kept saying to myself over and over again, “So that's what I've been doing, that's what's happening, that's what this dance is about.” I mean, I had no idea, no idea what it was. It was so hard to do it, just to be there and get through it physically, I had no idea what it meant or what it looked like or what it was about. Cunningham was very secret about what that was; he wouldn't even tell the dancers. He had a very mysterious quality. It was just your duty to get through the steps, to do all those co-ordinations, or syncopations or whatever.

Q / What happened after you, Jaap, tried to modernise the NDT?

JF / Well, I had a big fight with the directors I was going on with my American investigation. I asked people to visit the company, who I thought who were not too extreme, but who were able to change things. I asked Cliff Keuter to come and I asked Louis Falco, who came for the first time to Europe. Jennifer Muller too, she was with Falco. Actually, they were from the company of José Limon, I think. I tried to get Cunningham here, but... At first Cunningham said he would like to do it. But obviously he wanted to have someone first teach the company for about half a year his way of moving, and then he would decide whether we could take some of his pieces on the repertoire. Well, for a repertoire company this was of course a very difficult decision to make, more for me actually than for the company, because the company was not interested in that work anyway. They asked me whether I could ask choreographers like George Skibin to do *Daphnis and Chloe* and pieces like that and I said, well, I am not here for that and I think I am not able to do that.

The situation between the board of directors and me became more and more tense. At that time I was working with Carel Birnie, who is still the director of the company, but then, because we shared jobs, he was the financial manager, and I was the artistic director. He said to me, we should fight and see who will win. And so, at a meeting it was decided that I tell my ideas about the company and he his ideas about the money. The board of directors said, “with all respect for what you have done, but you have to make a decision. When you are going to follow the policy like you have done, which is losing audience, and we wouldn't like to see that. You will have to find works, which are more suitable for the company.” I said, “well, the company always had that kind of aim, to bring in work which made connections between the modern dance world and the more traditional world. I'd like to follow that up.” Then they said, “well, your decision is not to co-operate with us, then you should go”. That was it.

After I had left, they still asked Louis Falco and Muller, and they actually went on with the policy the company had. I think there must have been another reason they wanted to get rid of me. I must say, I was not such a good artistic director. I was quite chaotic. I had too many personal connections with the people, and for an established company, it's very difficult to have a chaotic director. That's probably one of the reasons also why they couldn't work with me. I think someone like Jiri Kylian is doing well.

Q / Were you frightened, when you made this big change, because the board of directors and you had a parting of ways?

JF / No, for me it was quite logical. There was no fright involved. I have never actually been frightened. I mean, as far as my work... No, I think people can switch... I think there were changes, and sometimes I was doubtful, but not frightened.

Q / Do you ever miss ballet?

JF / I think what Remy says is true. It's very difficult to get rid of your roots. I also wonder whether you should. There is something very personal about your roots, you have experiences. Slowly you incorporate other influences. You shouldn't be afraid about what is original. We are all influenced by all kinds of influences. I never felt that it was necessary to get rid of it, although I hoped that it would change. Some day, of course, you find out that there are many people, whether conscious or not, who are influencing you tremendously. When the original is there, it's there, whether you look for it or not. You will not be able to escape from that. It's a process of change, and it has a lot to do with all kinds of circumstances. It has not only to do with your dancing, but also with your way of thinking, your experiences in life. I never felt the need actually to strongly escape from something.

RC / I think what all of those big companies have now, is what I would call an international style of choreography.

Q / Could you describe it?

RC / They don't take any risks. They're not interested in trying to see what might happen when someone does an idiosyncratic movement, or something that really comes from the inside. It gets too frightening. Martha Graham, for example, stopped doing breathing exercises on the floor when people began to have experiences on their own. She didn't quite know how to deal with them. She codified her technique, instead of breathing, it was contracting and releasing. It gets so exaggerated that ...it gets to the men wearing gold jock-straps and gold high-heeled shoes and the women are all swishing around in pain. We know that everybody has pain but it's just a specific kind of pain that's inflicted by specific kind of cold high-heeled shoes and leather jock-straps. I don't think they allow for any moments of real truth. They're too frightened of it. That's why they didn't want Jaap around. He was really talking to the dancers and they didn't want that. They just want the dancers to come in and do as they are told. The dancers are trained in a certain way, so even they can't accept any change. They're just told, they're shouted at "Leg up higher! Get your foot there, faster, higher!" That's how they're taught, that's what they expect, that's what they need after a while. Many of them actually hit the students, "Get your stomach in!" or "Get your leg up higher" and they pull it.

Q / What was the difference between that and what Cunningham and John Cage were doing? I know there was a big difference between that kind of disjuncture and Waring's.

RC / What Cunningham and Cage were doing was more conceptual in effect, or... Cunningham usually had a continuous thread in a piece, from the beginning to end. It had a mood, and the music had a mood too. It may have been a different mood but when they got together they did something quite amazing. Like one of the first pieces I ever saw, Cunningham was crawling around on stage doing some wild thing, and the music was doing some other wild thing. And about two inches later on the tape, at the end of the piece, they got together and they both did exactly the same thing. It was so jarring to see that, the same thing, you know. So formally they were very similar, they both did things like that.

And, of course, Cage did that radio piece, with all these radios, and everybody in the audience had a job. At one point you had to turn the dial and at another point you had to turn the volume. It was for twelve radios. That was similar to what Waring was doing, what Waring did somehow was more... It was more emotional, it was funnier. Cunningham was also humorous in his early pieces, for example in *Cantic Muse*, or *Riot*. Cunningham and Waring were actually very similar, Waring was very influenced by Cunningham. Waring's composition class and Cunningham's studio were both in the Living Theatre building, on 14th Street. Cunningham had the upstairs studio and the Living Theatre was downstairs. Waring taught in the Living Theatre, in one of the little side studios. Later that's where Bob Rauschenberg and Judy Dunn taught their composition class.

Q / Was Waring often connected to the literary world?

RC / Yes, he had a lot of friends and a lot of interests in writing, in words. I just thought of a funny piece I saw at the Living Theatre. This is also John Herbert McDowell. The stage is very small, and he had about fifty people in the piece. The curtain came down and about fifty people took a bow but it was a different fifty people.

Q / That's wonderful.

Q / I was talking about that spirit of generosity a little bit yesterday. I remember when I first came in contact with those people. It may have been forced, but that's not the point. The point is that it existed. And whether they meant it, or whether they were doing it because it was what one was supposed to do, it had the same effect. I think that generosity is something that I miss very much in dance. I remember nobody would trash somebody else's work, at least not publicly. There was a kind of tacit rule of thumb, that you would say, "it didn't interest me," but you wouldn't trash it.

9

RC / Or you would even say "It's interesting," you know. It's very different now. The competition is much stiffer, and it's harder to get places to perform, and funding. I just spoke at Jack Moore's memorial service. I said it reminded me of the good old days at the YMHA. Every Sunday afternoon choreographers would present their works, extraordinary people, from Agnes de Mille, to Cunningham, to Katy Litz, to whoever. Everybody came to see that work. They worked all year long then they showed this one piece on Sunday afternoon. It was the same hundred people who were always there. At that memorial service there were the same hundred people, because they're so supportive. I made a special trip to go to New York to do that, and come back here. It just made me feel so good. It was a sad event, but just to see all those people – like Anna Sokolow and Viola Farber. These people were like family. Now it's very different. The competition between people nowadays is very difficult. A lot of it has to do with it becoming art. Because it's so difficult to be an artist, they make a special point, that they are artists, and that anybody else is not an artist. Then it becomes competitive, "I'm a better artist than you are."

After working with Cunningham for so many years, it was very, very difficult for me to try to begin to do my own, not only personal work, but also to move in a way that I would move. I started to work with Jean Erdman about the same time as I was working with Cunningham. Jean had done solo work with Cunningham, they knew each other very well. At one point Erdman pointed to me and said, "Cunningham, would you come over here?" It was then that I realised that something was wrong. I moved exactly like Cunningham. Every time I think of moving now, I think of moving like Cunningham. There are some people you might idolise, like Lisa Kraus, or Eva Karczag, and you begin to think like them, or be like them. I can't tell you how many people I've seen dance like somebody else. I won't mention any names, but you see somebody leaving somebody's company and it's just like a replica. It took me about... well, first of all I didn't even want to get near dancing, for three years I didn't dance, and then I started to do other things that lead into it so that I could learn to move in a different way.

Q / Who was influential on you? On your life?

JF / Oh, many people. Of course, the first woman I worked with was Sonia Gaskell. She was a white, aristocratic and upper class, Russian woman who had fled from the revolution and went to Paris and started to study with Anna Pavlova. Then Anna Pavlova's company fell apart when she died in Holland. Sonia Gaskell went to Paris and married a Dutch engineer and came to Holland. That's where I met her, that was very, very important for me. She was not only a teacher, but she was also someone who introduced me to different worlds, like the Bible, Stanislavsky, Ionesco, or people like Braques or Kafka. These were fantastic seeds she planted in me.

Later on, I think who had tremendous influence on me was Anna Sokolov, who came to the NDT in the beginning, when we started the company. I just got a very strong reaction on her presence, I felt that she confronted me with something truthful. She made me touch sources I actually wanted to escape from. She awakened all those sources in me by the extreme power of her personality. I couldn't escape from her. That was her image anyway, a woman who hit people in order to get down, right down into emotions you didn't want to touch.

Glen Tetley was a big influence. I saw him dancing because John Butler did *Carmina Burana* for the company that was in the second or third year that the company existed. Someone had an accident and Glen Tetley had to take over the role so I met him there. I found such an incredible organic connection in looking at his body that I was very inspired by that. I started to find those very organic connections and the emotional power of the movements itself. Tetley also started to make pieces for me and I started to understand his work better and better we made very close connections.

10 Besides that, seeing companies like Graham – they did their first European tour in 1952 or '53 – had a big influence on me. I was always doing my ballet story, my princes, and I was also doing the abstracts. Although I had already a need to get more and more away from it, I didn't know how, because when you are in a company you perform, 250 performances a year and you have a repertoire to remember 35 ballets in one season. I didn't have time to invest in myself. I just went on and did the things and hoped that I would develop. Seeing the Graham company, I suddenly saw very different sources of dance and... well, one of the most important source to me was the whole psychological approach to dance. Through investigating why she used the method, or why she used the material, and where it came from, I found out that there was a whole psychological context that was generating movement. I didn't know about that before.

Q / Did you start dancing with Cunningham soon after he formed his company?

RC / I was in his first company, yes. I graduated from art school in 1949 and started to study with him about two years later. He was one of the first dancers I had seen. I was too afraid to take classes with him, I went to other people before...

Q / Why Cunningham?

RC / Why Cunningham? Well, a girl friend I had in art school said first of all I couldn't be a dancer. Because when I lay on my back and stretched my feet straight out, my back arched. Unless I could get my back down to the floor, I couldn't be a dancer. She took me to Cunningham and she said that if I was going to study with anybody, then he was the person to study with. I was also impressed by his performance. I saw *The Seasons* at the New York City Ballet and then I saw him do a solo, which he called *Two Step*, in which he jumped out on stage, which was about five times as big as this. It looked like he jumped from the corner right into centre stage. I could hear a visible gasp from the audience. And he did these funny little dances. Then what happened was that I met him socially, before I actually knew who he was. I was living with Lou Harrison, the composer, at the time and Lou Harrison, Cage and Cunningham used to go out on double dates, go and eat dinner together. That was the time when Cage was eating with his left hand, or his right hand, because the left hand is for wiping your behind. He was involved with Indian foods, so he would eat everything, even if we were in Italian restaurants, he would eat everything with his right hand, including ice cream. That was how I learned that you can do anything, anywhere, and nobody pays any attention to you. You can do whatever you want. The first poster I ever did was for Cunningham, who did a concert with the Tanaquil Le Clerq and Patricia McBride at Hampton Playhouse. Then I started to take classes with him and I was in his first company.

Q / Who influenced you after you left Cunningham.

RC / After I left Cunningham? God, I don't know, but Cunningham influenced me a lot. He did a dance in which he wore some kind of cap over his head and he was crawling all over the floor. I turned to Cage and said, "He's not going to do that dance in front of other people, is he?" Cunningham looked like he was going berserk. Seeing that dance gave me the courage to do whatever I thought I would like to do. There's that kind of influence too, not through specific movement, but through someone who had the bravery to get out there and reveal himself being crazy.

About the Contributors

Charlip, Remy

Choreographer and designer, performed with John Cage, danced and designed costumes for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, co-founded the Paper Bag Players, served as head of the Children's Theater and Literature Department at Sarah Lawrence College. He was a guest teacher at SNDO in the 1980s. Remy Charlip is the author and artist of more than thirty books, including such modern classics as *Fortunately, I Love You*, *Arm in Arm*, *Thirteen*, *Mother Mother I Feel Sick* and, more recently, *Sleepytime Rhyme* and *Baby Hearts and Baby Flowers*.

Flier, Jaap

He was a founder and soloist with the Nederlands Danstheater from its beginnings in the 1950s. He was educated by Sonia Gaskell. He was artistic director of Nederlands Danstheater from 1970-1973, and then spent four years with companies in Adelaide and Sydney, and the Dance Company of New South Wales. In 1980-1989 he was artistic director at the School for New Dance Development. He is a freelance performer with various choreographers and theatre makers, including Jeanette van Steen, Fabian Chyle and Boukje Schweigmann.

Sommer, Sally

A dance historian, dance critic, and academic, Sally Sommer is widely recognized as a leading expert on dance in American popular culture. As associate professor of the practice of dance at Duke University, she taught courses in history of modern dance, history of African-American dance, and dance criticism. Since the autumn of 2001, she has been a full professor at Florida State University, teaching in the master's program in dance. As a dance critic and performance journalist, she writes regularly for periodicals in this country and for *Le Monde*, the Paris-based journal for which she is special New York correspondent.

Kraus, Lisa

Lisa Kraus is a choreographer, teacher, and writer whose career has included dancing as a member of the Trisha Brown Dance Company, choreographing and performing extensively with her own company and as an independent, teaching at universities and arts centers, and writing reviews, features and essays on dance for internet and print publication. Ms. Kraus has created over 30 performance works, several with her former New York-based company featuring John Jasperse, Sasha Waltz and Meg Stuart. She has trained in many forms and aesthetics including Graham technique, Indonesian dance, and the work of the Judson Church experimentalists. Ms. Kraus has a longstanding professional relationship with the Netherlands. She began a ten-year association with School for New Dance Development as an annually-invited guest teacher. In 1990 she relocated to the Netherlands to teach dance technique, composition, and improvisation at the European Dance Development Center in Arnhem for nearly a decade.

Colophon

TALK / SNDO 1982-2006 online is a series of online publications related to the School for New Dance Development, published as an extension of the book under the same name published in 2009.

Editor

Jeroen Fabius

Editorial support

Andrea Bozic, Lise Brenner, Elien van Riet, Gabriel Smeets, Nienke Tjallingii

Transcription

Jo Woodcook

Production

Peter van der Hoop

Graphic design

Esther Noyons

This publication was made possible with support from
Nederlands Fonds voor de Podiumkunsten+,
De Theaterschool, Lectoraat Kunsttheorie en Onderzoek,
Lectoraat Kunstpraktijk en Artistieke Ontwikkeling,
Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten.

School for New Dance Development www.theaterschool.nl.

All rights reserved. We have done all we could to contact everybody who has contributed to this book to obtain their permissions, whoever has been omitted we kindly ask to contact us.