

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report By – CADI MCCARTHY – 2007 Churchill Fellow

- **TO STUDY ACCESSIBLE DANCE THEATRE PRACTICES TO IMPROVE THE GENERAL PUBLIC AUDIENCE BASE FOR CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN AUSTRALIA**

My passion is to create accessible dance theatre for Australian audiences. It is my mission to create a dance language for people unversed in dance, providing dance that is relevant to the general public. I want to make contemporary dance theatre popular.

I want dance to mean something to the Australian community. When people ask me what I do and I reply ‘choreograph contemporary dance’, the majority ask me “what is that”. The remainder often say “I just don’t get dance” or even worse “I just don’t do dance”. It is my mission as an Australian choreographer to change this opinion and create dance theatre works that resonate with audiences.

The fellowship was a catalyst for new ideas, broadening my scope and understanding of contemporary dance theatre practices, challenging my thinking and improving my own practice

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Signed Cadi McCarthy

Dated 4/ 09/ 08

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1.PRECIS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report reviews the 2007/8 Fellowship visit to the **UK, EUROPE, USA & CANADA** investigating

• ACCESSIBLE DANCE THEATRE PERFORMANCES TO BOOST THE GENERAL PUBLIC AUDIENCE BASE FOR CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN AUSTRALIA

I involved myself by:

- Being involved in choreographic workshops and creative development projects with various Companies and Artistic Directors across the globe
- Discussing choreographic practices with a focus on accessibility with Company Directors and choreographers
- Viewing performances and attending Dance Festivals
- Discussing marketing strategies with the individual Company's administration staff
- Attending dance classes
- Collaborating with International dance artists

These experiences provided incredible insight into the choreographic practices occurring in dance theatre globally. The Fellowship has allowed me to bring these skills back to the ACT and to my work, helping the growth and development of Canberra audiences and Canberra based performing artists.

Thank you for such a wonderful opportunity

My visit overseas and the invaluable experiences would not have been possible without :

- the financial assistance of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
- the generosity and welcome of the people I visited and their willingness to assist in any way possible
- the ongoing support of my family throughout my travels

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Name: **Cadi Megan McCarthy**

Position: Independent Artist, Artistic Director Cadi McCarthy & Company, Freelance Teacher & Choreographer

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TO STUDY ACCESSIBLE DANCE THEATRE PERFORMANCES TO BOOST THE GENERAL PUBLIC AUDIENCE BASE FOR CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN AUSTRALIA

Fellowship Highlights:

Mute Comp:	Working with Danish Artistic Directors : Jacob Stage and Kasper Ravnhoj
DanseScenen:	Purpose built contemporary dance venue in the centre of Copenhagen - a haven of support for independent contemporary dance.
Scottish Dance Theatre:	Working with Artistic Director Janet Smith and Assistant Director Sally Owen
Touring:	Touring through the UK with Motionhouse and Scottish Dance Theatre
DanceBase:	Participating in classes at Edinburgh's Dance Complex
Martha Mason :	Collaboration and constant discussion on dance theatre practices
Tanz Amerique Dance Festival:	Attending Performances at this Dance Theatre Festival, Montreal
Kate Weare:	Working with independent dance theatre company, New York

Findings to be implemented on my company and to other dance organizations:

1. To create accessible dance works that reach the general public audience it is crucial to develop understandable thematic content and movement vocabulary, a very clear and recognisable linear narrative that is set within the context of the everyday experience - writing a storyline that is clearly formatted, followed and understood. It is possible to appeal to the audience by using understandable relationships, situations, humour and themes that are relevant and a language that people can understand
2. It is possible to expose the general public to dance through, theatricality, physicality, & multi - media. The use of popular culture interspersed throughout the performance acts as a guide to the audience and helps translate the dance vocabulary – film, multi media, & music.
3. The most important point of accessible dance is controlling the dynamic- the speed and rhythm of the show. Continually changing the elements of the piece, using different elements to surprise, fascinate and interest the audience. The trick is not to stay in one place too long – changes of mood – slow to fast-. The question always is; How long can we sustain each section? – How much can hold the audiences attention?
4. Dance is generally supported better and held in higher regard in Europe & the UK than in Australia. This support allows for companies to broaden their audience base through constant activity to help build the profile of companies and build bigger audiences. The development of artists must be supported if they are ever to reach their full potential and broaden the audience base.

5. The Dance Companies that have the largest audience base tour consistently throughout regional areas. Touring has been proven to help gain popularity and greater understanding of contemporary dance
6. Purpose built contemporary dance centres aid in the development of audiences through consistent exposure and regular performances and activity. These centres support artists through subsidised studio space, theatre support and an infra structure that helps with marketing and administration. This reduces the pressure on the artists who can focus on the development of new work. With increased support, activities can also increase and artists are able to create more work and build audiences through increased exposure.
7. It is important to engage audiences through forums, questionnaires and development periods of new work. Marketing is of vital importance to draw in audiences, focus needs to be placed on the images and wording to excite individuals enough to take the risk to see the show.

PROGRAM

Denmark

Mute Comp February 5th – 13th

United Kingdom

Motion House Dance Theatre February 14th – March 8th

Scottish Dance Theatre March 8th – 27th

Spring Loaded March 27th – April 5th

Germany

Tanz Compagnie Giessen April 5th – 12th

Festival Ost / West

USA

Snappy Dance Theatre April 27th – May 20th

Canada

TanzAmeriques Festival (Montreal) May 22nd – June 5th

USA

Kate Weare & Dancers June 7th – 18th

New York

June 7th - July 24th

Canada

Scotiabank Dance Centre (Vancouver)

July 25th – August 4th

Introduction

How did my journey to create contemporary dance that reaches general public audiences start? It was my desire to take my 'non' dance friends and family to a dance performance without them asking – will I understand it?

So began my mission to try and reach people, introducing contemporary dance to those unversed in the language of dance and making it relevant, recognisable, engaging, theatrical and based on themes of the every day. My agenda – change the perception of contemporary dance. So how do you go about this? Many times I would suggest to a group of friends and acquaintances that they attend a dance performance and I was often stopped in my tracks by the comments “I would love to but I just don't do dance”. So I would react “ Have you ever seen dance”, “Well no, but it is not something I am into “ and they would quickly walk away.

So step one is to get a reluctant audience into the theatre. As a choreographer, we have to get an audience on the merit of the work, because the audience should be excited to be there and the work should have an important meaning for them. The audience needs to have a thread that links them directly to what is being performed, a strong relationship with the performance.

It is important to try and make the work look like fun and something to make a night of. Ensure the work is dynamic, humorous and thematically driven, and ensure the audience laughs at least once. Most importantly, make sure they audience can identify with the characters.

So, after 6 years of creating accessible dance theatre works with my company in Canberra, it was time to work out what the next step is – How can I move out of a small venue into a larger one? Where do I draw a greater audience from? How do I market the work to a larger audience? and what choreographic devices should I include to ensure the work continues to grow and be successful?. It was time to travel and see what is happening around the world. I received the wonderful Churchill Fellowship to observe and learn how other organizations across the globe are working to successfully bring in new audiences.

MUTE COMP - COPENHAGEN, DENMARK:

Mute Comp is project based, dance theatre company that receives substantial funding from the Danish Government. The Artistic Directors / Choreographers **Jacob Stage and Kasper Ravnhoj** are both trained in physical theatre. Their work is highly theatrical and physical combined with raw energy and **Crash Dance**. Which is exactly as it sounds – dancers hurl themselves at one another in a highly controlled yet exhilarating way. This movement material is very exciting to watch as the dancers look as though they are taking great risks with their bodies. This is exhilarating to the audience as the dancers slide on their heads, throw themselves against one another and pound their bodies into the floor. The company is renowned in the Danish community for this style of dance and have become particularly popular with the younger generation. Over the years they have drawn in a new 'young' dance audience due to the thematic content of their work, the extreme physicality and rush of energy, the use of sets and exploring environments on stage, and humour, wit and the every day. The perfect foundation to grasp the 'non educated' dance audience.

SUPPORT

The company bases themselves at **DanseScenen**. **DanseScenen** is a contemporary theatre venue, especially built for contemporary dance and has a system where dancers pay a \$40 annual membership which allows them to rent studio space and the professional theatre venue at a subsidized rate. This provides access to the theatre for all professional independent artists and alleviates the pressures of trying to raise funds for theatre costs, which is a major expense for most small companies and individuals, and usually is the restricting factor of whether a show makes it past the creative

period. This allows for longer seasons in the theatre and a continuous flow of contemporary dance performances – which inevitably leads to a vibrant and happier community of artists, and consistent work, which raises audience awareness.

THEMATIC CONTENT

The piece ‘*Grasping the floor with the back of your head*’ was the new work the company was creating when I arrived in Copenhagen. This work was based on the concept of ‘*human beings messing things up*’ and looked at the thematic point ‘*where one good or bad decision can change the direction of your entire life*’. Kasper and Jacob incorporated Tarot cards to serve as a narrative and choreographic guide, and a basis for choreographic development– in all 22 cards were chosen to depict different emotions, images and circumstances. These situations involved human emotions that are relevant and immediately connect with the audience.

The work commenced with a very fitting series of voice overs that served as a clear introduction to the work. It is an immediate entry point for the audience, the last line being ‘**we always make our lives a living hell**’ - this helped the audience with the subject matter. As a guide for the audience, the company's choreographic notes, information and images on tarot cards and images from the show, were displayed in the foyer for the audience to browse and help them become acquainted with the subject matter and themes of the work.

Themes explored in the work

frustration	fragility	devotion
endearing love	vulnerability	fear of failure
rejection	lack of direction	self flagellation
religion – loss of faith	adultery	hope
relationship collapse	rejection	ritual, death
anger	symbols of power - monarchy	life is a gamble

Throughout the hour long work there was noticeable use of every day gesture, language, dialogue and humour. Throughout, the company breaks in and out of intense emotional physical dance phrases- where the movement material is gut wrenching, highly physical, emotionally demanding and spellbinding. They then move to text-based scenarios to absurd humour. They use voice, song, text and dance to help the audience through the journey of the work.

HUMOUR AND STORY TELLING

Kasper and Jacob both agree that humour and story telling are of vital importance. They cleverly draw the audience into works by creating tension and then cutting it down with humour, taking the audience on a journey of emotion. This can be exemplified through a section of the work where Tomas (dancer) is pleading with Sigrid (dancer) to love him, Sigrid constantly repeats “No, I don’t love you”. Tomas does everything in his power to assert his love for Sigrid – serenading her, reciting poetry, and stripping naked for her. It is all very funny at first but the more desperate he becomes, the more intensified is the issue of rejection. By the end of the scene he is in complete despair – tears flowing down his face, as he throws himself repeatedly at her feet as she rejects him over and over again. The scene is thick with metaphors and the audience has travelled emotionally from laughing hysterically at Tomas's antics to feeling so deeply for him, sitting in absolute silence. The work then dramatically cuts the scene with a completely new situation and takes the audience on a new journey. This is very engaging and it was completely unexpected. The scenes are short and strong, with Kasper and Jacob knowing exactly when to shift the momentum of the work.

This work did not have a linear structure but was episodic with an underlying theme and characters that linked the entire work into a coherent whole. When I asked Kasper and Jacob about the relationship with the audience in the creation period they stated ‘**that the audience is in their mind when creating a new work, they said that over time they have developed ‘an innate understanding of what they will understand and find engaging’.**

POPULAR CULTURE

Another way the company has worked towards engaging a new audience was to invite the popular Danish band, *Valraven* to perform live on stage throughout the performance. Having the instruments played live added a new element to the work – the band was nominated for an award at the Danish equivalent of the Grammy Awards. The band was cleverly interwoven throughout the performance, providing the score for the performance. The energy of the live band was electric and the performances resembled a rock concert. Another drawcard for a younger audience, Anna Catherine the enigmatic lead singer was a focal point throughout the work and provided transitions from one scene to the next.

MOTIONHOUSE DANCE COMPANY, LEAMINGTON SPA , BRITAIN

**Motionhouse was voted the UK's favourite dance company at the National Dance Awards in January 06
26% of attendees are completely new to dance, 92% of the total audience said they are likely to see the work again.**

So what makes Motionhouse such a successful dance company. Once again there are many factor that contribute:

- An explosive style of dance that includes, high and intricate lifting sequences
- The use of harness work where the dancers bungee through the space and out over the audience
- A very clear and recognisable linear narrative that is set within the everyday experience - a storyline that is clearly formatted, followed and understood
- The use of film interspersed throughout the performance to act as a guide to the audience and helps translates the dance vocabulary
- A clever use of everyday objects in an abstract setting ie: swivel chairs and swinging doors
- An emotional and lyrical musical score that compliments the storyline
- A clear use of theatricality and every day scenarios throughout the work that the audience can immediately relate to.
- Humour

Kevin Finnan, Artistic Director states that **'Most choreographers make dance with no regard for the audience, Motionhouse thinks purely of the audience and this is what kept them alive'**

DRIVEN - PERFORMANCE WORK

To expand this a little further I will briefly outline the plot of the work **'Driven'** choreographed by Kevin Finnan. The audience enters the theatre whilst a film plays on the scrim at the front of the stage, it has images of the dancers in a nightclub. The scrim lifts to reveal the five dancers continuing the narrative in the nightclub - trying to work out their relationships with one other – focusing on every day issues of self consciousness, attraction, love, lust and trying to fit in. Couples are established and re – established – the dancers manipulate each other's bodies to try and outdo one another, and look better than the person before. This is a high impact and physical opening scene incorporating large lifts, fast paced action that draws the audience in from the beginning. The scene concludes with, Junior (male dancer) being seriously injured in a car accident – this is delivered through the sound track. The piece then delves into the emotional anguish of having a loved one in a critical condition in a hospital room and how different people react to this extremely emotional situation. This is when the harness work is introduced as Junior is lifted off the table. This is a spectacular image as the characters limp body is flung across the stage. The work then jumps back in time – through film - to the initial meeting of the characters this allows the audience to place the scene in context. The live performance then takes the characters to the work place, to the bedroom, and builds the relationships of the characters , eventually ending back at the nightclub where the events started. Through abstraction and narrative the story culminates with 'Junior' awaking from his hospital bed to find that his five friends have all moved on.

Each scene is designed to be easily read by the audience, and includes flying sections (that are scary, risky, heart racing, highly engaging and exciting), humour, a clear storyline, film, an excellent soundtrack, and interlaced throughout are sections of abstract contemporary dance and a deep underlying message.

Driven which I was lucky enough to observe in both the rehearsal process and on tour (Tewkesbury, High Wycombe, Crawley) is set within the confines of a square rig which allows for the harness work (this is toured with the company). The work was designed especially for the 'non dance' public, easily marketed, as all the elements drew the audience in – impressive physicality, easy to understand theme, humour & harness work.

Notes to dancers - 'focus on the integrity of the relationships and the integrity of what is being said through each gesture. Try not to overdo the interaction, less is more. Don't force the connections between the relationships. Make things appear as realistic as possible without overacting the elements. It is important to focus on the narrative. This is very crucial to the reading of the work'

COMPANY STRUCTURE

Motionhouse is a unique company as it caters directly to a 'non dance' audience and successfully turns them into a 'new dance' audience.. This is a well funded dance company with a hectic touring and educational schedule which fuels the work and boosts audiences. 2008 was the 20th anniversary of the Company, they are well established and recognised nationally. Kevin Finnan, states '***the work is all about accessibility, the reviewers might not love it but the audiences do***'.

The company creates two programmes per season: one that is staged in the theatre and the other is site specific, a free dance performances in every day places – this increases the audience base and brings contemporary dance to the public – rather than going to the theatre – the theatre goes to the people. These works are specifically designed for certain spaces and include sets and costumes.

TOURING

The success of the company is due to its intensive touring calendar to regional areas throughout the UK. The company performs 80 dates of their short festival pieces and 40 dates of the main stage show in an 18-month period. This way the company reaches a large demographic of people. Touring with the company I realised the positive affect of regional touring in bringing contemporary dance to the people. The company tours to regional centres and this not only provides the company with an income, but it also allows a larger range of people to view their work and help build their popularity. The regional centres seem genuinely appreciative that *Motionhouse* takes the time to visit their town, the audience is positively responsive. This concept brings the dance to the people rather than the people having to go the city to find the dance – this is a good idea and a positive way of generating an audience and an income. The company receives £263 000 a year in funding. They gain extra income from theatres who buy their show, educational workshops and selling tickets from their main stage shows. The company originally started performing in small venues, community halls, schools anywhere that was suitable. They performed works for everyone in these venues, they were inexpensive, easily toured and accessible. From small things big things started to grow and word spread about the company. Touring has always been seen as an important way to access a larger audience, educating and developing an appreciation for the dance art form.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESSFUL DANCE THEATRE PERFORMANCES

Finnan is interested in the question what do 'general public audience' want from a performance. He has created his own recipe for successful dance theatre

1. The rhythm of the show is the most important element and should override everything else. If the rhythm is not right then the show will not work – ebbs and flows – the audience needs to attach themselves to the work – they need to believe the ideas and the concepts. You need to buy the audience's time or they will not come back. You need to balance the imagery and the movement – the imagery comes before the movement – if the audience cannot see the imagery then they will not believe the movement. For audiences, it is important to build the space – set the scene and provide the audience with a context that is believable.
2. The first 20 minutes has to be fast paced, theatrical, physical and humorous. Early on in the choreography fling in something flashy, grab for the audience – captivate them and involve them in the work.
3. It is important to have a strong beginning, middle and end – with a strong and definite conclusion.
4. Once you have won the audience over in this way – you can explore the more abstract elements and the audience will be more willing to listen to the work.

5. The centre of the piece is where the 'artistry of contemporary dance' and the in-depth discussion can take place
6. Then the end has to return to light - fast paced and dynamic dance to draw the audience back. This is what keeps an audience going.
7. Humour is important as it is for the audience and helps to buy them. Humour is created for an audience – it is there to entertain
8. He believes the most important point of accessible dance is controlling the dynamic- the speed of the show. Continually changing the elements of the piece, using different elements to surprise, fascinate and interest the audience. The trick is not to stay in one place too long – changes of mood – slow to fast-. The question always is; How long can we sustain each section? – How much can hold the audiences attention?
9. Use the old theatre craft tool– continually developing the use of the prop – i.e. harnesses – keep bringing them in - make the prop the language of the piece.

POPULAR CULTURE

The use of film adds contextual information for the audience and aids in understanding, addressing another emotional level. Finnan believes that incorporating film and other media is important as it has become such an important aspect of every day life. Dance needs to be up to date with technology.

FESTIVAL PIECES

The Festival works the company creates are short 15 minute pieces – abstracted narratives that are flashy and fast paced. The works are designed to captivate the audience as they walk by. The most important question here is once you have caught their attention how do you keep them watching? According to Finnan; it is done through - theatricality, music choice and big tricks and lifts. The audience has to see that the dancers are highly skilled and be startled with the intensity of movement.

ACCESSIBILITY & THE COMMUNITY

Finnan considers the company a 'community company', although he states that this is a death wish and they need to be very careful with their wording as - community dance is not valued by the arts bodies or the critics.

The company also spends a lot of time in schools, teaching workshops, choreographing on youth groups, holding summer schools, and elite dance programs. They are active in the surrounding communities, as this commitment to the people has also led to greater development for their work. Schools are important to the company, students come to watch performances. Workshops are taken pre and post performance as an introduction to the company and are followed up with sessions to answer questions. This is growing the future audience for dance. The company uses questionnaires after every performance that the audience can fill out either after the performance or online. This provides the company with a guide as to what the audience understood, appreciated and enjoyed. And, most importantly provides insights into aspects the audience did not enjoy.

FUNDING BODIES & ACCESSIBILITY

The downside for the company is that due to their accessibility. They appear not to be valued for generated or developing the arts and bringing it to the general public audience–this is the most annoying aspect for Finnan . How can a company that is doing so many positive things for dance not be recognised for developing and educating audiences. So, another major factor that needs to be addressed is the education of the funding bodies and the theatre powers who decide what is 'art ' and what is not. If there is a company generating so much buzz with audiences why are they not causing the same buzz within the arts funding environment.

AUDIENCE REACTION

I invited two people 'both non dancer audience members' to a Motionhouse performance, as this outlines the success of the company. Both were awe-struck with every element of the work. They bought the CD the DVD and signed onto the mailing list. They were both taken away with the music, narrative and the emotional integrity of the piece. They will be back to see the next Motionhouse performance. Finnan holds a forum at the end of the performances - a Q and A session. These demonstrate just how successful the company is – people were so impressed by their work and really understood the story line and what was being said. This understanding empowered the audience and they felt a sense of fulfilment in having understood the work.

SCOTTISH DANCE THEATRE – DUNDEE, SCOTLAND

My initiation into the work of Scottish Dance Theatre occurred at The Place in London. The theatre was packed to the rafters with a young audience, excited, energetic, thriving. After hearing the rapturous applause of this young audience at the end of the night, and the vibrancy and buzz post show, I was extremely anxious to learn more. Hence commenced my three week residency with the company. In this time, I watched an audition for apprentice dancers, viewed rehearsals, dress rehearsals and performances, taught and participated in company classes, toured with the company (London, Inverness, Edinburgh and Dundee) and discussed ideas with company Artistic Director Janet Smith, and Assistant Director 'Sally Owen'. This company of 10 dancers was one of the most hospitable groups of people I have encountered in my whole professional career.

DEFINED _ PERFORMANCE

The company was premiering their newest season of works: entitled *Defined* including '*Tenderhook*' choreographed by Liv Lorent, '*In the Middle of a Moment*' choreographed by Uri Ivgi and '*Dog*' choreographed by Hofesh Schechter. Having just marked their 21st anniversary, Scottish Dance Theatre are a company ranked among the UK's senior modern dance groups.

Tenderhook – Liv Lorent: *Tenderhook* was a 20 minute work that had no clear narrative, text or any of the components that have been previously mentioned, although this work was accessible due to its music score, beautiful imagery and use of props. This work is lavish and exciting and just beautiful to watch. The dancers glide through the space in the same way as a beautiful landscape. Due to its length of approximately 20 minutes the work said just enough to keep the audience satisfied. It had a strong cinematic look, beautiful lines and themes of stretching oneself. Reaching beyond the body, the use of clever lighting and twirling ribbons made it feel quite spiritual and indulgent.

'Liv Lorent is a difficult choreographer to pigeonhole. She is both an original and an old-school romantic, but in Tenderhooks she seems to veer to the latter. On first view, her eight dancers appear to be acrobats from a very old-fashioned circus, twirling spools of ribbon as they spin and run on pointe, showing off a vocabulary of flying lifts and balances. With Ezio Bosso's score referencing the nostalgia of 19th-century waltzes as well as the religious ecstasy of composers such as Arvo Pärt, this is a work that seems merely to take a rapt, whimsical pleasure in the skills of its gymnastic cast'. Judith Mackrell – The Guardian, March 2008 .

In the Middle of a Moment – Uri Ivgli and Johan Greben: '*In the Middle of the Moment*' provided an insight in to a couple's intense relationship. The duet was set in a 3 metre square, which highlighted the drama. It was also a short work, that is beautifully constructed and the audience develops a clear empathy with the characters

DOG – Hofesh Schechter: '*Dog*' by Hofesh Schechter had strong music, which ranged from Brazilian to Bach, and defined the contrasts of movement. The title gives nothing away. It had a hard edge to it, which Smith described as urban. She also gave some insight in to how she felt Hofesh was trying to demonstrate how humans try to connect / belong. As Janet Smith commented, *"I think he is asking 'Are we the Ultimate? Can we not go any further? Is this it?' There is a deep irony in a piece called DOG - 'god' backwards - in which a portentous statement about evolution covers the beginning of the soundtrack. Dog* was a funny work. It was 30 minutes of ferociously patterned dance. Schechter mingles smooth and slow with hard and fast, both in his music, and the choreography

AUDIENCE REACTION

I took a newly befriended individual to the performance of *Defined* in Inverness. Bonnie, age approximately 40, had never seen professional contemporary dance before,. She had decided to go to the movies and I made the suggestion that she should come to the theatre with me. She was '*up to the challenge*' as she put it. Bonnie sat quietly and intently through each performance and I asked her numerous questions regarding her reaction to each. She thought that: '*Tenderhook*' was beautiful. She was taken by the musical score, the fluid movement of the ribbons but most of all as in awe of the dancers physicality. She was taken away by the piece and thought it as '*very beautiful*' *In the Middle of the Moment* she said seemed to '*be about the couple not being able to live with each other any more*' I said there is no right or wrong in the interpretation but that is what I thought it was about too. The piece that really excited her though was *Dog*. Bonnie was inspired by the constantly shifting music, the choreography and the excitement of never quite knowing what would happen next. She used the words '*it kept me on the edge of my seat*'. She was inspired by the physicality, the tribal quality of the movement and the overall dynamics of the work. I asked her '*Would she go and see contemporary dance again*' and the reply was a resounding 'yes'. When I asked her why she had never been to dance before she answered '*Growing up I was never exposed to the theatre, it would never enter my consciousness to go. My family had never gone,. It would never occur to me to go or that I would even enjoy the experience. I guess I just never really knew about it and therefore never would think of going*'. I asked if she would go again. The answer was

'I think I might take my sister and niece I think that they would really enjoy it'.

THE AUDITION

Every year, companies in the UK can audition for apprentice dance artists. Fourth year dance students from around the world can audition for a place in the apprentice program, which is supplemented and run through 'The Place' tertiary dance institution's graduate program. If successful, dancers are provided a one year placement in a company [many company's in Britain are signed up for the program] and have to complete academic requirements ie: a journal and a paper, and if they pass successfully it counts as the first year of a Masters in Fine Arts. This allows highly trained dancers with a transition from training to the professional sector in a well funded and controlled environment. It is a wonderful teaching tool.

TOURING

Similar to Motionhouse Dance Theatre, Scottish Dance Theatre spends the majority of the year touring throughout regional Scotland and other European centres to aid in the development of their audience. In the short time I was with the company they toured to London, Inverness, the Isle of Skye, Edinburgh and Dundee all in a three week period,

performing twice in each venue. This is a very active company that prides itself on bringing dance to all areas of Scotland. In addition to this hectic touring schedule are educational workshops, performance forums and talks in schools. The company is also a community company although unlike Motionhouse, the company is provided with opportunities to tour internationally and has a greater worldwide acclaim due to their combination of works by up and coming international choreographers.

SCOTTISH DANCE THEATRE COMPANY STRUCTURE

Scottish Dance Theatre is based in the small but vibrant community of Dundee. The company has an Artistic Director, Janet Smith and Assistant Director, Sally Owen, ten dancers, plus two apprentice dancers, four administrative staff and an education unit. They are well supported and are based in a community arts centre that has studios and a theatre. They are a company that never loses sight of the fact that it is rooted in a local Scottish community.

DISCUSSION WITH ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, JANET SMITH

The major priority Janet has as an Artistic Director is to produce high quality dance that will engage both dance audiences and people new to dance language. The words she keeps in her mind are '*access and excellence*' Scottish Dance Theatre originally grew out of the need for dance to reach the community and it has flourished since then. The company endeavours to make work that connects with the every day person. They focus on commissioning emerging choreographers to create new works on the company, choosing works and ideas that sit well against each other. The company believe that audiences enjoy different flavours and styles, and that a variety of works will excite people differently and capture the imagination of individuals in unique ways. She believes that this is their '*winning ticket*'.

For example

- Liv Lorent's work is autobiographical, looking at relationships between people, and how they either work together or are opposed. Relationships are complicated and it takes work to make them become fluid.
- In the Middle of the Moment explores relationships within a small space, a claustrophobic relationship where the audience plays the voyeur sneaking a peek into this couples lives. It reflects on all relationships and is a short snapshot in time.
- Hofesh Schechter is a choreographer who has been fast tracked to the top, The British Arts Council has invested heavily into his success and it has paid dividends. Schechter's work is the voice of now, urban, hard edged. He uses ironic metaphors to establish themes, in this case evolution and watches life from above. In Dog he explores a search for connection, subversion and oppression, and a fear of getting too close.

Scottish Dance Theatre average around 600 people per performance, their demographic is varied with audiences from youth, middle, older and arts communities

HOFESH SCHECHTER –UPRISING / IN YOUR ROOMS, EDINBURGH

I was lucky enough to experience Hofesh Schechter's new work, In *Your Room* (the company have just been granted triennial funding from the British Arts Council). In 2004 Hofesh Schechter was commissioned by 'The Place' Prize (London) to create a work. The work was one of five selected finalists and was announced the winner of the Audience Choice Award in that year. From 2004 – 2006 Schechter was the Associate Artist with 'The Place' and was commissioned by their Robin Howard Foundation to create the work '*Uprising*'. This ever popular work for 7 men won

him rave reviews throughout London. In 2007 London's three major dance venues, *The Place*, *Southbank Centre* and *Sadlers Wells Theatre* collaborated on a unique producing venture, commissioning Schechter to create his new work '*In Your Rooms*', which was presented at all three venues and culminated in sell out performances.

This venture, providing an emerging artist with adequate funding, time to produce a quality work and prestigious theatre venues has boosted his profile as well as that of contemporary dance. His work is unique, dynamic and accessible; using a collage of mediums, including overlaid dialogue to give the audience a hint to the thematic content; industrial, urban, eclectic original music that appeals to a younger audience (he composes and creates the music electronically as he choreographs the work), striking lighting – that takes the audience from complete black out to intense white light back to black, and highly physical, gestural movement material.

What interests me most, and I spoke in depth to Sally Owen (Scottish Dance Theatre) about his work and success is his emphasis on spatial patterning on the stage and the basic choreographic tools – time, space, canon, group work, and unison. His work focuses on moving patterns and people in space, Sally suggested that many younger dancers in Britain are no longer taught these foundation skills in choreography and he has grasped them and turned them into something new, that in turn looks thrilling on stage.

Another reason for his extreme popularity with young people is the success of the British TV series '*Skins*'. He was given the opportunity to create the opening dance sequences for a the series, that is a cutting edge fictional series that focuses on teenagers in the real world; it is honest and real, and looks into the issues that really affect teenagers. – It is raw, provocative, and explicit and the younger audiences love it. One of the main male characters is a dancer and he is very popular. Having dance as a major focus in the series has lifted the profile of Schechter's work and young audiences are flooding into the theatre to see it.

DANCE BASE - EDINBURGH

In the Grassmarket in Central Edinburgh there is a state of the art dance centre covering three floors; studios, performance space, change rooms and arts offices. This is a centre specifically for dance and the independent dance community. There are classes every day over the 5 dance studios and rehearsal studios available for professional companies and residencies. This facility helps build awareness of all forms of dance and dance practice, and it is a vital component of Edinburgh's contemporary dance scene. In the space of three days I was able to participate in stretching classes, a professional master class, contemporary and modern classes and ballet classes and watch rehearsals for a new work by a resident artist.

SPRING LOADED Performance FESTIVAL (London) 'THE PLACE' – Robin Howard Theatre

Spring Loaded is a renowned showcase for some of the most refreshing artists choreographing in the UK. The Place invests in commissioning initiatives that have enabled many of the artists to research, develop, create and rehearse their work. Since the season's launch in 1987, this investment has spawned many familiar names in contemporary dance, including Matthew Bourne, Wayne McGregor, and Lloyd Newson.

Company: PROBE – Performance: Magpie: 27th - 29th March *Magpie*, a duo performance (performers Theo Clinkard & Antonia Grove) provided an eclectic showcase of short snappy dance pieces, spanning the gamut of dance styles from dance theatre to the post modern work of Trisha Brown. The choreographers included: Jeremy James '*Scag*' 1993, New Art Club's '*This*', Trisha Brown '*Accumulation*' 1971, Yasmeen Godders '*I feel funny today*', Charles Linehan '*A Way Now*', Stephen Mear '*Last Laugh*' and Mark Bruce's '*The Sky or the Bird*'. This was a highly entertaining, strong, accessible evening of dance with the right mix of humour, abstraction, text, integrity and fun. The evening was thoroughly enjoyable and successful in its continually shifting works that kept the audience on their toes. The use of a variety of choreographers provided the audience with an array of works that flowed seamlessly from one to the other without the dancers leaving the stage. The company has a major touring schedule where theatre venues book and pay for the show. This is a similar principle to Motionhouse and Scottish Dance theatre. This is difficult to do in Australia without a large budget, although possible if you focus on regional areas within a state. The company also offers various workshops and master classes that focus on repertory, improvisation and creativity.

Company: LOST DOG – Performance: Hungry Ghosts - April 1 & 2 *Hungry Ghosts*, choreographed and performed by Ben Duke and Raquel Meseguer, was a dance theatre work that explored the loss and guilt experienced by the survivors of random acts of terrorism. The hour long performance, combined text and dance with a very strong narrative, emotional intensity and occasional humour. The work used a clever premise of terrorism – focusing on a scenario where terrorists had taken over a theatre and held the audience hostage. The piece was very successful in its marriage of text and dance as the audience bounced forwards and backwards through time, looking at relationships and life before and after the hostage threat. Interwoven through the work were cleverly designed sections that lifted the

spirits of the audience through humour and irony. The narrative was clearly laid out– this provided the audience with a clear understanding of what was happening at all times. This was a very cleverly thought out work.

TANZCOMPAGNIE GIESSEN, GERMANY: Artistic Director: Tarek Assam

Germany's dance structure is completely refreshing and different to what I have witnessed so far. In Germany, dance companies are permanent residents in the theatre houses alongside the opera, orchestra and theatre companies. No matter how large or small the town is, they follow a similar structure. The company performs consistently throughout the year and they have a large and appreciative audience. The success of this structure is due to a number of factors. Firstly security, the artists, and choreographers feel that they have the chance to develop and pursue their art as they are provided studios, a theatre, secure positions that are well paid, and resources. From this strong foundation it is possible to successfully grow a sustainable company and an appreciative and educated audience. As Tarek Assam (company Artistic Director and Choreographer) states '*I can educate the audience in dance due to continued exposure*'. Each year the company creates a number of shows, they have both a main stage theatre and an experimental theatre. On the main stage, Tarek suggested that he has to make some artistic sacrifices to please the audience. For example his latest creation 'Faust', is an extremely popular German story and therefore appeals to a large audience, added to the mix, lovely movement phrases and then you have a successful production. As part of their program Tanzcompagnie Giessen, and three other theatre houses from around Germany collaborate, combining approximately 8 short works that are toured to smaller venues throughout Germany and Brussels (I had the chance to tour to Brussels with the company) this is known as **Tanz Art Ost - West**, the program not only allows for the companies to work together but brings dance to the smaller communities in regional Germany.

The company is made up of 10 international dancers, and they perform 5 seasons a year. Assam choreographs for the company as well as brings in visiting choreographers. In my week with the company, I watched the opening night performance of their season 'Faust', toured with the company to Belgium where they performed two short works: a duet for two men, and a duet for women which included a film as part of the Festival, watched rehearsals for the remounting of the work *Angel* for an upcoming tour to Portugal, as well as the creation of two new works by visiting choreographers. This is a busy company that has a steady touring and performance schedule. The works that the company produces include elements of comical humour, pure dance and multi media that help to bring the audiences in to the performance.

The Companies Appeal

- Multi media
- Narrative
- Lyrical movement vocabulary
- Large performance and touring program
- Company and Dancer security
- Audience development opportunities

SNAPPY DANCE THEATRE (Boston) –Artistic Director: MARTHA MASON

'...wildly entertaining... a unique non stop variety and excitement' : The Royal Gazette

'Snappy Dance Theatre: They are shaking up Boston's dance scene with a snap, crackle and pop package of athleticism and creativity!' Dance Magazine

'Snappy Dance Theatre – where Dance and Theatre join the Circus, Enthusiastically' The New York Times

After Germany I headed to Boston, USA to work with Martha Mason, Artistic Director of Snappy Dance Theatre. The company is a collaborative ensemble that uses their diverse movement backgrounds to stimulate and inspire audiences by incorporating athletics, gymnastics, circus skills, martial arts, vocal work, theatre and dance into a fun filled evening of short works that entertain and provoke. Martha believes that it is important to involve audiences. In her words '*audiences often feel estranged by contemporary dance and she is on a mission to change this*'. She believes that it is important for people to have ownership over the work to provide a sense of empowerment.

Another way Martha tackles audience development and accessibility is to include short, snappy pieces in her performances. One performance evening may be made up of 13 works that use a strong sense of narrative, theme, and circus skills. By providing a rollercoaster ride of short works, that consistently change in tempo and pace and emotional material the audience is kept interested and amused. This is what Martha believes fuels her success. In her works she has also incorporated a focus on local artists: she has used local bands, famous artists and technology art

from students at MIT.

One way that Martha tackled audience accessibility was to invite six people into the studio to watch rehearsal for the piece Flip/Switch. For two hours the six watched rehearsals and afterwards were asked what they liked, didn't like – what excited them etc. They came back to the rehearsal studio six times to help mould the piece and design various sections. Towards the end of the rehearsal process they were brought back into the studio to appraise the work based on their feedback. Martha believes that when a person invests their time they almost become a member of the company and actively endorse them. This support leads to a growth in audience, as donors are excited and in turn that excitement filters to their friends. For two weeks Martha and I collaborated at the Green St Studios (Cambridge) in Boston. Together we created a 10 minute duo that is a combination of both our styles.

FESTIVAL TRANSAMERIQUES DANSE THEATRE - MONTREAL – 22nd May - 5th June

Attending this Festival was outside of my original program, although when I found out that it was on, and the festival was so closely related to what I was investigating, I could not resist flying to Montreal. It was an outstanding Festival and well worth the diversion. The companies viewed were all highly successful international dance theatre companies. Over a period of two weeks dance theatre companies from Europe and Montreal performed in venues throughout Montreal. The Festival was extremely well funded by both the Montreal and Canadian Government and corporate sponsors. The Festival was composed of free short works as well as theatre based performances. What amazed me most about the Festival was the number of venues that Montreal had on offer for independent contemporary dance works. Every performance I attended was sold out, with lines of people queuing to enter the theatre 30 minutes prior to the commencement.

Melt - Noemie LaFrance: Standing inside the Place Des Arts at 10pm at night, I viewed this magnificent work through a large window looking to the outside. The piece was a free 15 minute installation at the Esplanade de la Place des Arts. Performed high overhead, fastened to exterior walls, five female performers, their bodies covered in beeswax and lanolin, unfold their dripping limbs in a desperate attempt to escape harsh immobility as they literally melt under the heat of the lights and the sun. Noemi LaFrance is renowned for her dance performances in highly unusual sites such as a dilapidated swimming pool, a staircase, or an indoor parking garage, creating dance that slips seamlessly into the space, transforming urban spaces into a performance space, spaces we pass every day. On the occasions that I viewed the performances the audience numbered around 300, people passed, became transfixed and viewed the 15 minute work. The wall chosen for the performance was on the way to the Place Des Arts Metro Station and caught a flood of people as they walked pass to catch the train.

Maybe Forever: Damaged Goods – Brussels: Choreographed by Meg Stuart / Phillip Gehmacher - Place Des Arts – Cinquieme Salle. Performed in conjunction with a live musician, Belgian singer – songwriter Niko Hafkenscheid, Maybe Baby is an encounter where everything falls apart – through text, dance and song the work explores the melancholy of a relationship collapse. Interspersed throughout the work are instances of humour, and the text and music changes the dynamics of the work where the dance is primarily based on manipulated everyday gestures.

La Ou Je Vis – Boundless Bodies: Le Carre Des Lombs – Montreal: Choreographed by Danielle Desnoyers - Agora De LA Danse. This work was absolutely brilliant. There were 5 dancers, three men and two women. The piece combined dance and multi media beautifully as the dancers integrated with the live production of drawings, animation and affects that were projected on to the back scrim and on a blackboard that was wheeled into the space. The choreography was simply stunning. Although the material did not have a clear narrative, a strong relationship could be developed between the intention, colour and ferocity in which the artist manipulated the images behind the dancers. In this way a clever relationship was developed between the dancers and the illustrator. The set was not highly technical and kept a minimal appearance, although the illustrations on the back scrim were a collage of ideas, intention and emotion. On all levels this was one of the most beautiful pieces of dance I have ever seen. The choreographic material was beautifully constructed, wonderfully performed and the work, at an hour long, was the perfect length to keep the audience interested.

Is You Me- Venue: Usine C - Montreal. Choreographed by: Benoit Lachambre, Louise Lecavalier and Laurent Goldring Per. B. Leux – Once again this work took the audience into the realm of dance and multi media. The back scrim was continually manipulated by the artwork of a multi media visual artist that in turn manipulated and affected the dancers aiding in the narration of emotion, mood and intensity. The visual artist Laurent Goldring made bodies appear and disappear, using live drawing and video as both lighting and set design. The dancers were almost comic in character. Dressed in hooded tops and sneakers they created strong emotional scenes and solo performances only coming together briefly in the final stages of the work. This work was definitely abstract in nature although the intensity of the music score, and the animation of the characters linked with the intensity of the multi media made the

work extremely accessible to a younger audience.

NEW YORK

I caught the plane back to the USA, and headed down to New York. New York offers a wealth of dance. Here are just a few of the companies I experienced. First stop **Alvin Ailey Dance Company** one of the most successful and longest running modern dance companies in the world – and they most certainly delivered. On one of the hottest days in New York history, with the temperature soaring over 100F, I took myself to the Brooklyn Academy of Music to watch the Company. The theatre had a packed audience – with not an empty seat in the house. This audience who obviously love their dance company were boisterous and excited, Alvin Ailey is Brooklyn's Black American Dance Company. The company presented three works all of which had a strong narrative and were set in recognizable scenarios – a steamy jazz club, a church etc. The works were set to popular music that was catchy and had the audience stamping and clapping in their seats. The audience clapped after every trick, pirouette, jump and duet and were absolutely engaged throughout, this is an accessible dance company that has lasted the test of time and are as popular as ever.

Cedar Lakes Ballet Company is also a very successful dance company, the reason for their success lies with the support the company are given. They were provided with a purpose built theatre and studio, have 16 full time dancers and a large administrative staff. In part, this company has gained popularity due to their high quality marketing material and promotional press. The company has a large international focus and brings in international choreographers as well as touring annually. Due to their financial position they are able to employ the highest level dancers as well as gain a large profile in the commercial environment.

Momix were performing at the Joyce Theatre, the company work in the genre of human puppetry and illusion. The dancers were magically flung through the air, and contorted their bodies in amazing ways. The theatre is a clear hybrid between circus and dance – working with tricks, acrobatics and narrative. The narratives are short and sharp and work with humour. This company is very clever and brings in audiences through its use of illusion, humour and narrative. This is a very fun genre of dance

KATE WEARE & DANCERS

Unfortunately due to other international commitments, I needed to change my plans in New York. This ended up being a blessing as I joined up with independent choreographer Kate Weare. I spent around three weeks with this group of amazingly committed artists gaining an insight into the New York independent contemporary dance scene. Kate Weare has a unique style of choreography where she seamlessly blends contemporary dance with a tango influence. The company cleverly integrates the two genres and creates works that focus on relationships. This company was interesting to visit as it was the closest in all aspects to mine in Australia and it was interesting to discuss the challenges of working in dance. The company is supported through philanthropic means and has the capacity to create works as well as tour throughout the USA. Weare recently won an award in New York that was established by an ex dancer who was tired of abstract / post modern works that she did not understand. A competition was set up that was judged purely by the audience. This competition has been presented for about three years, and uses audience feedback and scores to judge the works. This way the general public audience can be completely responsible for the outcome.

CONCLUSION

After over six months overseas I am back in Australia hungry to bring all these experiences to my own choreography. I wish to thank the Churchill Fellowship for this opportunity, my eyes have been opened and my passion renewed. I am clear as to what I want to do with my company.

FINDINGS / Direct Recommendations for companies in the dance theatre genre:

1. Successful accessible dance works reach the general public audience through understandable thematic content and movement vocabulary. A clear and recognisable linear narrative that is set within the context of the everyday experience - a storyline that is clearly formatted, followed and understood. Appealing to people by using understandable relationships, situations, humour and themes that are relevant / and a language that people can understand.
2. It is important to expose the general public to dance through recognisable images, theatricality, physicality, and multi media and popular culture. The use of popular culture interspersed throughout the performance acts as a guide to the audience and helps translates the dance vocabulary – film, multi media, and music.

3. Dance is generally supported more generously and held in higher regard in Europe and the UK than in Australia. This support allows companies to broaden their audience and through constant activity helps build the profile and bigger audiences.
4. The Dance Companies that have the largest audience base tour consistently throughout regional areas. Touring has been proven to help gain popularity and greater understanding of contemporary dance
5. Purpose built contemporary dance centres aid in the development of audiences through consistent exposure and regular performances. Also, these centres support artists through rent free space, theatre support and an infra structure that helps with marketing and administration. This reduces the pressure on the artists who can focus on their art. With increased support, activities can increase and artists are able to create more work and build audiences through increased exposure.
6. Important to incorporate audiences through forums, questionnaires and development periods for new work.
7. Marketing is of vital importance to draw in audiences. Attention needs to be placed on the images and wording to excite people enough to take the risk to see the show.

RECOMMENDATIONS –

1. One of the major hurdles that small companies and independent artists have to tackle is expenditure for theatres, studio space and marketing. It would be beneficial to design and build an independent contemporary dance centre. This would alleviate the pressures of fund raising and allow for longer seasons and a continuous flow of contemporary dance performances – which inevitably leads to a vibrant and happier community of artists and consistent work that raises audience awareness. These venues need to include a subsidized theatre venue, rent reduced dance studios and administrative staff to help support artists. If there are professional dance centres that are purpose built and house numerous independent artists and companies, supporting them in the development and presentation of new works, the population will become aware of dance activity and will be more willing to involve themselves in this community. This has been evident in complexes such as DanseScenen, Copenhagen; Green St Studios, Boston; Dance Base, Edinburgh; Dance Theatre Workshop, New York; and Scotiabank Dance Centre in Vancouver.
2. Funding needs to be provided to smaller companies to enable regional touring to smaller communities in Australia. The success of many of the companies visited came from consistent touring to small regional centres. This not only boosted the performing calendar and activities of the companies, but takes contemporary dance theatre to the population which bolsters its popularity. For a Canberra based company for example; it would be beneficial to take a small company to regional centres such as Cootamundra, Goulburn, Orange, Bateman’s Bay, Bega etc. Venues could be subsidised to ‘buy’ the dance work rather than the artist using grant money to pay to hire the theatre. More long-term partnerships could be forged between the artists and the presenters. Some kind of additional support is also required to facilitate touring. Subsidised airfares and freight costs would alleviate some of the difficulties of traversing the vast distances of this country.
3. Dance Theatre needs to be given greater recognition through government support, popular culture and advertising. Governments and the powerful private sector need to monetarily back professional live performances to help to raise the profile. The general community could be encouraged to take pride in supporting local artists in the same way they support sports men and women. A strategic initiative for promotion and publicity would help support this kind of dance advocacy. Schechter has successfully broadened the contemporary dance audience through his foray into television and this has been intensified through the push he has been given by the funding bodies in promoting, touring and developing his work
4. Festivals need to be established for dance theatre performances as these will appeal to general public audiences. If the focus is on ‘the general public’ then audiences will be more willing to attend. This has been shown to be successful through the TanzAmerique Dance Theatre Festival in Montreal, Dance Theatre Workshops constant performance schedule, New York, Festival Ost - West Germany and the activities at the Green St Studios, Boston and Dance Base Edinburgh. Festival directors could be encouraged create a platform, presenting the work within an appropriate context.
5. Companies should be encouraged to hand out questionnaires that the audience could fill out either after the performance or online, this provides the company with instant an guide as to what the audience understood, appreciated and enjoyed. And most importantly provides insights into aspects the audience did not enjoy and why? This information informs the company about areas which could be addressed for future shows. Public forums and greater information exchanged through educational workshops, dance development will lead to a bigger profile for the art.

Any of these changes require more financial support than is currently available. Choreographic development in Australia proceeds unsteadily in an environment of economic rationalism. Intense competition for limited funds means that very few choreographers can be supported on a consistent basis. To make a significant difference in the community greater support and monetary backing needs to be given to boost the profile of dance in our society. If dance were given even a third of the commercial support that was given to sport its profile would rise. With such limited resources it is difficult to get into the consciousness of the general public and this is a step that needs to be taken to bring about change. Leaders of our Federal and State governments must recognise in financial terms the importance and relevance of the arts to the general cultural and social fabric of the Australian community. On a smaller scale it would seem that my company Cadi McCarthy & Company and organizations which follow the same model need to continue to grow to encourage audiences to dance. Through greater activity, touring and marketing these companies can slowly build.