

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by

Leanne Ringelstein

2001 Churchill Fellow

OBJECTIVE: To gain further experience in performing, to learn innovative choreographic methods and to acquire new ideas for teaching students and professional dancers - USA

INDEX

INTRODUCTION	Page 2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	Page 3
PROGRAMME	Page 4
Performance Experience	Page 4
Performances Attended	Page 5
MAIN BODY	Page 7
Mentoring Programs With:	
<i>Brenda Way</i>	Page 7
<i>KT Nelson</i>	Page 9
Alternative Performance Experience With:	
<i>Janice Garrett</i>	Page 10
Education Programs for Children	Page 11
CONCLUSION	Page 12
RECOMMENDATIONS	Page 13

INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin by thanking the **WINSTON CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP** for the wonderful opportunity I received while in the United States of America. Now that it has been a few months since my return to Australia, I am still digesting the magnitude of my experience. The San Francisco dance community opened their doors for me and allowed me to learn, participate and grow as an artist.

I was truly honored to be part of **Brenda Way** (Artistic Director of ODC/SAN FRANCISCO), **KT Nelson** (Co-Artistic Director of ODC/SAN FRANCISCO) and **Janice Garrett's** (Artistic Director of Janice Garrett and Dancers) working process. They enriched my life with many fond memories. They inspired me with their wealth of knowledge in the industry.

I would also like to thank **Ellie Klopp** (Contemporary Teacher/Rehearsal Director of Margaret Jenkins Dance Company), **Liz Roman** (Contemporary Teacher/Choreographer), **Elizabeth Greville** (Classical Ballet Teacher), **Kimi Okada** (CO-Artistic Director of School Programs for ODC/SAN FRANCISCO) and **Margaret Jenkins** (contemporary Teacher/Artistic Director of Margaret Jenkins and Dancers). They each allowed me to continue my training under their guidance. They were all very established artists and all very unique.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leanne Ringelstein
33 Torwood St.
Auchenflower QLD 4066

(07) 3876 2143
Mobile 0421 357 933

Professional Dancer, Teacher and Choreographer

OBJECTIVE: To gain further experience in performing, to learn innovative choreographic methods and to acquire new ideas for teaching students and professional dancers – USA.

During my stay, I was influenced by many people. The most valuable lessons were from Janice Garrett, Brenda Way, KT Nelson and Kimi Okada.

The majority of my stay in America was in San Francisco. On two occasions, I was also able to perform in Los Angeles, and I visited New York and Las Vegas for 2 weeks. Some of the highlights of my stay in San Francisco were performing and choreographing at **Stanford University, ODC/San Francisco Theater** and the **Yerba Buena Centre**, as well as touring to, and performing at, the **Getty Muesum** and **The Palace Theater**, both of which are in Los Angeles.

During my stay in America, I was able to see and experience how the arts community there operates differently from their counterparts in Australia. First of all, I observed that the arts culture in America offers education in the arts for children of all ages, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. Everyone has access to experience the arts, either through participation or in viewing performances, and thus it is more widely accepted as part of their everyday culture. The dance companies together with the education department initiate residencies for schools to access. Thus, even those who may not have the financial capacity to participate in or attend such events are given the opportunity to do so while at school. In addition, dance companies often allow audiences to view informal performances of works still in progress before the official performance season.

PROGRAMME

I spent most of my fellowship time with ODC/SAN FRANCISCO. The Company is comprised of an Artistic Director BRENDA WAY, Co-Artistic Director KT NELSON, Co-Artistic Director of School Programs Kimi Okada and 10 Exceptional Dancers from the USA, Cuba, Japan and Brazil.

I also worked extensively with Janice Garrett and Dancers at ODC/SAN FRANCISCO Studios and at the San Francisco Dance Centre Studios.

In addition, I visited the Rhythm & Motion Dance Studio and Dance Mission Studios to take classes.

PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE:

- ODC/SAN FRANCISCO: At the Getty Museum in Los Angeles 2000, for the Gordon Getty Concert Series
- ODC/SAN FRANCISCO: At The Yerba Buena Center in San Francisco 2001, for the Companies 30th Anniversary
- ODC/SAN FRANCISCO: At the Gary Soren Smith Center in San Francisco 2001, for the 5th Anniversary Season
- JANICE GARRETT & DANCERS: At the Palace Theater in Los Angeles 2000, for the Praxis Project
- JANICE GARRETT & DANCERS: At the ODC/SAN FRANCISCO Theater 2001, for the annual season
- “Borrowed Space”, Co-Choreographed with Heidi Schweiker: At the Stanford University Campus 2000, for the Stanford Dance Division of the Department of Drama
- JANICE GARRETT & DANCERS: At the SUMMERFEST 2001 gala.

PERFORMANCES ATTENDED:

SAN FRANCISCO:

- ODC/SAN FRANCISCO: “The Velveteen Rabbit”, “Dancing Downtown”, “2001 Gala Opening Night”, as well as three other shows for the three week season; “Verge”, “20th Anniversary Gala for the Theater”, and “Unplugged”
- OAKLAND BALLET: “Repertory Program #3”
- SAN FRANCISCO BALLET: “The Sleeping Beauty”, “The Student Showcase”
- THE DIABLO BALLET
- ROBERT MOSES’ KIN: “6th Annual Home Season”, “Lone”
- BERKLEY BALLET: “The Nutcracker”
- JOE GOODE PERFORMANCE GROUP: “Undertaking Harry”
- LEA WOLF: “Diving Up”
- MUSICAL “LES MISERABLES”
- MUSICAL “CABARET”
- ALONZO KING’S LINES BALLET: “Spring 2001 Home Season”
- MARGARET JENKINS DANCE COMPANY
- MAXINE MOERMAN DANCE THEATER.
- ERICA ESSNER PERFORMANCE CO-OP: “Sudden Pictures”
- SAN FRANCISCO LESBIAN AND GAY FESTIVAL 2000

LAS VEGAS:

- MUSICAL “STORM”
- CIRQUE DE SOLEIL: “Mystere”

NEW YORK:

- ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER
- RONALD K. BROWN: “Evidence”
- RENNIE HARRIS PUREMOVEMENT: “Rome and Jewels”
- STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY
- SEAN CURRAN COMPANY
- MUSICAL “THE LION KING”

MAIN BODY

I had the opportunity to absorb many wonderful things during my stay in the USA. The level of support for the dance community from the general public was definitely a highlight. It has been ingrained into the Society, that dance is a part of everyday living. There are a phenomenal number of open classes available each and every day of the week, from morning classes to evening classes. Further, to see these classes filled with all types of people from lawyers to mothers, young and old, was quite exceptional. I also observed that these classes brought all types of people from different ethnic backgrounds together, something that is surprisingly rare in regular day to day living. Live musicians were also an integral part of the participation experience.

Working with an established repertoire dance company, ODC/SAN FRANCISCO, gave me a sense of dance movement and styles over the past 30 years. Being part of the present, and observing many of the company's past works, educated me on the continual changing growth of modern dance. Learning works from the ODC repertoire gave a foundation for my movement vocabulary. I was extremely fortunate to be choreographed on for the company's new works, and to also choreograph my own movement in their new works.

MENTORING PROGRAMS WITH:

Brenda Way (Artistic Director: ODC/SAN FRANCISCO)

Brenda has been running this successful company for 30 years. Throughout her career, she has drawn upon many facets of her own personal life to create new works for the company. She draws inspiration from a variety of sources including a dancer's individual talent, an interesting dress, a domestic crisis, major political issues, historical events, a picture, the texture of music, or from basic every day life, in order to create and produce new works.

Brenda has explained to me that ideas can develop in her mind for a year or two, or sometimes even over five years, before she will incorporate them into a movement. By the time the dancers are beginning the first stages of her rehearsal process, Brenda has already formulated the structure of the piece and the movement quality. Her direction is always very clear and calculated, which eliminates anxiety amongst the dancers when undertaking a new work. When I enquired whether her finished work, polished and precise, represents her initial idea, she replied “Sometimes yes, sometimes not so much”. Perhaps after all these years of producing so many new works annually, the unknown of how a piece will transpire from it’s original conception through to final result is what keeps Brenda inspired.

I was fortunate to be involved with 3 new works during my time with ODC/SAN FRANCISCO. Each of these pieces was very different. Brenda would generally devise a base movement phrase that all the dancers would learn. We were then given tasks to suit the various sections she had formulated in her mind. Next, we would generate movement that incorporated her plan. Brenda would then use basic choreographic tools such as retrogrades, inversions, canons, numerical systems and spatial forms to add impact to the new movement. Her mind, and her vision for the piece, was always one step ahead. She was very clear about her spatial patterns in each section of a piece, and these needed to be in harmony before we explored new movement.

Brenda’s knowledge, experience and wisdom have nurtured a vibrant and ever changing environment for the arts community in San Francisco. Her support of the independent dance community has provided them with the ability to explore and perform in the ODC Theater regularly throughout the year.

KT Nelson (Co-Artistic Director: ODC/SAN FRANCISCO)

Almost all of KT's work comes from an emotional concept. Her works appear to be sourced from an awareness or a perception of something she has experienced, with this experience being revealed and expressed through her choreography. KT's inspiration comes from a personal place and is abstracted in the hope to understand the concept better and give it a larger voice. The emotional landscape is the initial idea, and then she creates a structure that captures its feeling or notion. KT finds music that supports the structure and the content of the emotional landscape, and then she will make up movement for the various parts of the structure. Even though the piece seems complete, it is not unusual for the piece to be changed or adapted during the rehearsal process. The emotional story is sometimes set up with specific theatrics and sometimes a kinetic image. During the rehearsal process there was always a collaborative exchange amongst KT and the dancers. Generally her works are developed into three types of movement.

1. *The Phrase*, 2. *The Image*, and 3. *The texture*.

KT's structure and form is very different to Brenda's. Her belief that dance and music are excellent ways to convey feeling, and her ability to play with boundaries both on and off stage, generate a sense of freedom for the dancer and the audience. For example, the middle section of stage or frame was not entirely interesting to her. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to work with KT. Her extraordinary energy and distinct movement vocabulary were both innovative and expressive.

The implementation of school programs, annual performances for children, and other specific programs for adults, has helped to ensure the survival of ODC over the past 30 years. KT's vision, together with the support of Brenda Way, has generated an exceptional community awareness of dance. It is KT's belief that it is essential to maintain cultural health for all artistic generators so that the community will support a wide range of art forms. Further, the quality of an art form is dependent on the quantity of community support it receives, i.e. those who support the art form through their participation, and those who support it through their attendance at works. When the cultural health of art forms is observed, works of meaningful quality are generally successfully produced.

ALTERNATIVE PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE WITH:

Janice Garrett (Artistic Director of Janice Garrett and Dancers)

Janice Garrett is a Freelance Choreographer and teacher who creates most of her works in Europe and teaches often at ODC/SAN FRANCISCO Studios. I first met Janice while taking her technique class and found that the class was dynamic, very technical, creative, with well formulated exercises, and most of all fun. I was able to learn more from her than any other teacher or choreographer. Her charismatic personality inspired all the dancers to find new and interesting ways of doing each movement. Janice was able to articulate each movement with clarity. At the end of each class, there was always thunderous applause from forty or more people in gratitude for the energy she gave, and therefore the energy reciprocated amongst the participants.

Janice Garrett and Dancers performed five works at the ODC/SAN FRANCISCO Theater. Two of these works were choreographed especially on me (which was a huge privilege). I was also fortunate to be the only dancer to perform in all five works. Each work was highly technical, aesthetically different and cardio-vascularly demanding. Her attention to detail, diverse rhythms and counts, sometimes made her work a mathematical nightmare. It is these qualities that make her choreography so intense and exciting.

Her works ranged from quirky, fast, sombre, slow, lyrical, theatrical and comedic. Her artistic vision was always very clear. Janice's choreographic techniques are characterized by a mixture of styles from both KT Nelson and Brenda Way. She is extremely versatile and diverse with her movement vocabulary.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN

Once a year ODC/SAN FRANCISCO brings children from the ages of 8 to 14 years together to participate in a workshop for one week. I was very lucky to be part of the Summer Kids Workshop for 2 years running. The children arrived at 8:45am and joined in with fellow students and teachers for a morning circle from 9:00-9:10am. The morning circle, which is comprised of games that teach rhythm, creative movement, voice technique etc., takes place at the commencement of each day. The children were separated into three groups depending on age and sometimes their ability. Each child would do a contemporary dance technique class, which was accompanied by two live musicians, followed by a music technique and a vocal technique. In the afternoon, students would learn aerial technique. Aerial technique involved the use of apparatus similar to circus work, also incorporating dance movement while on the apparatus. The children would then choose from one of the composition classes e.g. dance composition, vocal and music composition, and aerial composition. The day would finish with rhythm and vocal games for the last 20 minutes. Beginning and finishing the day with all the children and staff together was beneficial for everyone. We were able to address feedback from the children especially at the end of the day. On the last day the children participated in an informal performance, showing snippets from each of the technique classes and their composition pieces. This was definitely the highlight of the Summer Workshop.

It was amazing to see the children's progress even after only one week. I think this sort of program would definitely be successful here in Australia. The children were like sponges, learning many new creative ideas and techniques. They integrated with other children from different racial and socio-economic backgrounds. The staff was diverse and very inspiring, challenging the children to learn new concepts in a safe environment. This workshop environment allowed children to express themselves, and fostered self-esteem and healthy body image.

Other alternate children's workshops/Summer dance camps provided field trips in and around San Francisco with Jazz, Hip-hop, Brazilian, Afro-Haitian Dance classes as well as Capoeira, Caribbean drumming, Brazilian drumming, Afro-Haitian drumming. This program was at the "Rhythm & Motion Dance Center" and was held for three two-week sessions. In addition, the children visited museums, parks and other cultural centers.

CONCLUSIONS

The principle difference in contemporary dance between San Francisco and Australia is the volume of people who practice the method of technique both young and old. Contemporary dance classes were held all throughout the day, every day, by many different studios. Many participants will attend a class before or after work. The general public will undertake a contemporary dance class for a variety of reasons including fitness, technique, enjoyment and fun. In Australia, generally only professional dancers will attend a dance class.

The independent arts scene in San Francisco is widespread and well supported by the general community. There are many people who are creating new works in the independent scene for non-profit organizations. In addition, the demand for such work ensures that there are more venues that are intimate and can cater for small audiences. These venues support the independent artists by providing open spaces for performances at certain times throughout the year. Festivals in San Francisco also provide one to two week seasons for artists to showcase their works, and because of the multicultural nature of the San Francisco community, these festivals are derived from a variety of cultures and traditions.

The implementation of children programs and residencies with dance company's educate children to appreciate the art form of dance, providing them with the opportunity to participate in movement classes, and to understand that movement can improve creativity, co-ordination, general fitness, strength, visual learning cues and much more. At the end of each session, the responses from all the teachers were extremely positive. The children always enjoyed the performance more if they had participated in a residency before seeing the show. Most schools from San Francisco are part of the program to bring students along to a company's performance season during November of each year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the experiences I have had in America, I can see how the dance community or even the broader arts community, could improve what they are able to offer people here in Australia. If given the opportunity to advise such groups, I would suggest that where our arts industry is fundamentally lacking is in education. Education about the art form is extremely important for both the general community and also the arts industry. The wider community needs to gain awareness by supporting both local and national talent. The only way the community can do this is to be provided with the opportunity for involvement. Many people complain about not understanding contemporary dance, and to be honest, this is not their fault. Dance companies should implant an educational component into their infrastructure to inform audiences about their artistic intention. I believe if audiences understood the nature of contemporary dance, then more people would gain from the experience. For example, discussion evenings could be held about the choreographers intention, the composer, or the music used in the performance. In addition, the dancers could show a snippet of movement to facilitate the discussions. These discussion evenings could be held several weeks prior to a performance season.

The arts industry should be educating not only the general community but also the arts community. Australia produces many talented dancers, choreographers and performers each year. The small number of companies in Australia does not facilitate the demand for jobs. Most of the performers give up at the end of the university degree or full time course because they cannot gain employment, which is very disappointing for the arts. A negative perception of the dance community thus follows.

At present, education in the arts offered through schools is inadequate. Generally, instruction in the arts is provided by teachers who may not necessarily be, or have ever been, 'artists'. In addition, young people have little access to performances or events. Sometimes the cost proves to be prohibitive, or perhaps the scheduling of events generally in the evening makes it difficult for young people to attend. Further, very few events are directed at young people, thus making it not interesting enough for young people to want to attend such an event. Hence we are failing to cultivate the

next generation of people who will appreciate the arts. In order to foster an appreciation of the arts, to nurture the cultural health of society, I believe that it is the arts community that must take on the responsibility to pass on their passion for the arts. The arts industry should make education of the arts their focus. For art forms, and specifically for dance, to be relevant today, and to ensure that they remain relevant in the generations to come, our children need to be offered the opportunity to participate in and view performances and events. Students could be offered the chance to regularly attend viewings of works still in progress, or up and coming events. In addition, specific school programs could be developed in conjunction with dance companies, to be undertaken during designated school holiday periods. Generating more awareness of dance among today's youth promotes a healthy arts industry for the future, and not only for dance, but across all art forms. The school programs and residencies will also foster an awareness of other art forms such as the music and theatre industries. In addition, introducing world dance and music into the school programs and residencies will educate and bring awareness about other cultures and ethnic backgrounds, and promote better understanding and acceptance of cultural differences.

Such steps to improve the profile of dance will also cause a spill-on effect within the arts community whereby the greater number of events offered will provide more opportunities for dancers and other artists. In doing so, an environment is created where there is more demand for artists with specific talents and training, thus reducing the number of artists who are lost to other professions because they are unable to sustain a reasonable income from their art form. I believe that students of high calibre should be inspired to continue their involvement with the arts even if a professional dance career hasn't been possible. The standard of dancers here in Australia is very high and should be cultivated. Dancers should continue to create their own works by forming independent dance companies. The number of independent companies in San Francisco is simply amazing. The sheer quantity of companies ensures that the independent industry is nurtured. In addition, performers supported each other more because many more people were involved. At present I am contracted to teach contemporary dance at the university level. Having experienced the dance culture of San Francisco, I feel compelled to pass on more than just technique to my students. I hope that by educating students about the life of a professional dancer, choreographer or performer, I will be able to implant the desire for them to create their own works once their studies have finished. Further, I hope to open their minds to the possibility of

collaborating with other artists, both in their field of dance and other art forms, such as music, sculpture, or design. The more people generating work and being involved in work will promote even greater awareness throughout the general community.

I also plan to provide information to dance companies interested in initiating specific schools programs and residencies such as those in San Francisco. I will advise these companies on the structure and format that was used since this has already proven to be successful.