

Kevin Finnan

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At the recent National Dance Awards Motionhouse received the audience award for 'Perfect' our most recent production. It was a proud moment for the company.

The award was quite unexpected. As I made my way to accept the award I considered what on earth I should say. I certainly did not wish to sob profusely and thank all living things, deities and celestial movement of the spheres for our success in an Oscar winning starlet gush. Neither however, did I wish to simply mumble 'thanks' and stomp off in a grumpy punk 'up yours' fashion. Passing tables of people, the great and the good of the dance world, many of whom had absolutely no idea of who we were, I was struck by the journey we all make in our work and what it is that sustains us.

I began my professional career as a dancer in 1985 and formed Motionhouse with Louise Richards in 1988. An intense period of time striated with memories of M1, M6, M25, M40 (which did not exist when we started – Oh My God), M4, M5, Travel lodge, Travel lodge, Travel lodge. It has been in many ways a very long road to our current eighteen year 'overnight success'.

The real journey of course is not the roads travelled in great haste, dubious transport, and high hopes, but the journey of the art. This journey is embodied by the choreographer and the dancers. What is the nature of this journey and how do you sustain it?

A key observation is that this is not a linear process. This process does not build brick by brick, to become better and better and now finally, you're great (as much as I wish it did)! The journey is much more complex. Sylviane Agacinski proposes that "... time always makes and unmakes at the same time. Advances and declines are contemporaneous with each other; births and deaths are both daughters of time." The essential quality of this journey is a 'making' and 'unmaking' which occurs at the same time.

In announcing our award, Angela Rippon described Motionhouse as a 'small dance group' which made me smile as it conjured images for me of us meeting every other Tuesday for biscuits, personal reflection and an occasional waltz rather than the reality of the committed, professional organisation it is necessary to be for small dance companies to survive in the current financial climate.

A dance company is a volatile organism held together under great strain, there are never enough resources and, as a collection of creative individuals, it is constantly splintering as those individuals eventually leave to follow their own course. It requires

constant 'making' to keep it alive. The choreographer in a small company is a 'constant' but needs to change and grow. The dancers are by the very nature of small companies ever changing but it is necessary for them to try to maintain and develop the 'constant' of the company work and identity. This fact of the 'constant' choreographer and the 'changing' company maintains a dynamic tension within the work which can become either an insuperable problem or the turbine of development for ongoing work. How do I, as the choreographer, deal with the challenge of time for myself and my company?

Every work you make creates a history which can be both a support (as your reputation) and a tyranny ("done that before"). It is vital to develop as a choreographer in order to create new work. By 'new' I do not mean the current fashion for novelty. I believe each artist has their 'work'; it contains a signature, a mark which they cannot escape because they embody their work. The essential quest of a vibrant art is how the ongoing work is challenged, developed and even transcended.

As a young artist I was filled with certainty and the arrogance of youth. I was swept away with discovering my own work. In working with others I drove through what I thought was right in the conviction that I was 'following my vision'. As my history grows longer I am interested to find that the key element of my future is the 'unmaking' of myself as a choreographer.

The fruits of experience are the ever expanding skill set that comes from a life spent making work. This breeds a confidence and a belief that problems can be overcome and that the task in hand is always achievable. The threat of experience is the invidious paternalism (the latent 'I know best') which can creep into the process especially when the age gap between the choreographer and dancers grows ever larger. It can be damn tough to accept, when perkily informed by someone fresh from college, that something you have been practising for twenty one years with Stalin like devotion "isn't very good". I believe that it is the smart choreographer who listens.

The gift to the maturing choreographer is the challenge of younger artists. I work to find in myself the humility to listen. To understand that being responsible for the 'vision' and having the last word does not mean always having the last word.

I decide that I needed a framework for my development that was not simply 'doing the work' vital as this is. I felt I needed an external referent. I chose to invest my energies in research and education. First with an MA and then subsequently with my PhD. This embrace of new ideas and philosophies has fundamentally shattered old certainties and created for me a vast array of exciting possibilities.

There can be no 'I know' posturing in such a sea of knowledge. My role now is to mix this flood of ideas with the positive benefits of experience and embrace the youthful

challenge of the company. In this way I am 'unmaking' myself as choreographer while constantly striving to develop my relationship with the dancers in a 'making' of the company and the work.

My journey in art is to question and expose the limitations of what I know while validating and supporting the knowledge and experience of the younger artists I work with.

As I made my way through the tables to receive our award from 'Angela' I had asked members of my company to come with me. One by one they found excuses and pressing engagements elsewhere. Finally, as I walked onto the stage I had one remaining dancer with me who then changed her mind at the last minute and chose to hide behind a potted palm which then quivered suspiciously.

It was clear what I had to say, I thanked Louise Richards the Director of Motionhouse who 'makes' the company every day and all the office team who help her. I then thanked the dancers who are the work. Without them there is no work. They are the blood and fire of creation. For me choreography is not making steps, it is a process of exploring ideas and people. I was thankful of the opportunity to publicly acknowledge my debt to, and appreciation of, the dancers, even if they chose to hide behind ornamental plants. Thanks Angela!