

## WORKING WITH COLLEAGUES

### *The experience of composing dance with music*

This article aims to bring forward my experience of composing dance instantly while working with the musician, music composer, piano and electronics player Amund Røe and the cellist Exequiel Gonzáles. I would like to share my experience and some related reflections that developed during the two artistic encounters. Also I intend to grasp the specifics of each of these artistic work experiences, as well as to mention the elements I perceived as similar in both encounters.

I had chosen to work with the musicians in order to deepen my bodily knowledge of how I create dance next to music when both are created instantly. A pure wish to bring together my dance and my colleagues' music and get confronted by this happening. More specifically, I have been interested in noticing any principles, tendencies or (implicit) rules established in our communication and ways of relating.

Besides my inner wish and the will to be highly responsive to what my colleague is doing, there was a moment of permission to let my dance exist next to their music. It was right when my body felt no more capable of containing/embracing the complexity of what was happening *out there* (in the realm of the sound). The memory of Cage and Cunningham in an interview about their collaboration crossed my mind. When they talk about their common work, at one point they are asked how they actually compose dance and music together. One of them responds: "we do our work and we do it next to each other". To permit this epistemological switch through my body was paradoxically a deserved challenge. It taught me an important lesson about the *in*-dependency we are to establish. Dependence originally being "action growing out of another action." It opened a parallel pathway I could continue working *along with* the music, but paying attention to my need to understand on a deeper level (corporeally, emotionally, rationally, ...) how the work '*is being done*' between us.

### **Working with Amund Røe**

Amund is a music composer able to create images from a great depth, with precision and delicacy. He is as well a pianist and organist. Amund comes from Norway, actually based in Rotterdam. When we work together, he plays electronics. Our collaboration begun in 2014 when I kindly asked Amund to compose a short piece based on his perception of space (the inner and outer space) while composing music. At first, working on our own, the focus has subsequently become centered more in creation of the actual material within shared space and time. Our collaboration is rooted in the common need to listen to details and let evolve the specific atmosphere of the theatre of intimacy. My attention is continuously brought to the precision of placing my moves within the evolving sound-scape which, once meeting in space and time, leads towards the creation of a monolithic but multilayered image.

### **Working with Exequiel Gonzáles**

I have worked with Exequiel since spring 2016. Exequiel is an excellent cello player, originally coming from Argentina, for a long period has been based in Spanish Valencia. Our work is centered in making music and dance within a shared ground, letting come together our different (artistic and cultural) backgrounds. Exequiel coming from the classical tradition, having passion for the classical Indian music. Me based in contemporary dance ultimately working from the technique of the instant composition. Departing from

one's well known territory, when making I was actually interested in: how can we actually make this come together? How do we approach this difference and how do we let ourselves be molded by it?

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Working with both musicians has been full, rich and very specific. In spite of the specificity, there have been similarities in both works.

### *Time*

Coming to collaborate with my colleagues, I was ready to dive into hours-long studio rehearsals. In both cases I was surprised by the different timing/time perception of the musician. Rather short, but intense rehearsals (suggested by them) first put me out of my box and thus suggested me to reconsider my time management. This experience has taught me something essential about my own time attitude, discovering other possible rehearsal structures. Having the musicians' time attitude and perception in the same room, so physically close by, inspired new manners of counting, not counting and timely being (in time, on time, out of time,...).

### *Structure*

I understood that the instant composition is using what I have got at the actual moment in order to make dance. While working with the musicians, many questions emerged concerning the ontology of this practice – *how is becoming what is being made, from where/what place is it coming forth, what are we using in ourselves to make what we are making in that very moment*. I felt there were individual inner pathways each of us had to stroll through until being allowed to meet the other in the actuality and outside-ness of time and space.

When deepening my rational understanding of what were the differences between our individual ways of making, the use of pre-structured (already known, learned or in any other manner processed) material called my attention. Working with the cello player, my point of departure was an image captured in words or my bodily sensation, eventually a piece of poetry I would share with the musician to inform him, provide a thread to make. Exequiel, the cellist would share that even though he was improvising, there was an implicit structure, an order to the piece. He was playing and improvising *from* the pre-known musical structures I could recognize when hearing them. The element of the recognition of the musical material appeared in the work with Amund's electronic music, as well, but in a different (almost impossible to verbalize) way. I explain it to myself like this. The anatomy of the instruments. The anatomy of Amund's electronics allowed for greater (rhythmical, textural, dynamical) variations of the actual sound, which would pull the recognized towards the not-yet-known or always alternating material, meanwhile the purity and virtue of the cello evoked a linear given-ness, almost predestination. The word I identified when working with the electronics was *un-predictability*.

### *Instrument*

Working with the two musicians/musical instruments have taught me substantially. Early on, while working with Amund, once when laying down and listening to his play my body revealed me something new. In that instant, it was not only my ears hearing the sound, but the body was hearing the diverse sound textures *through* its different parts. The sound details awakened the bodily details. As a variety of sounds was produced, the movement would all the time slightly shift the zone of its responsiveness, of its origin.

Through the actual work as well as through the observations of the video material, I have realized that my dance is choreographed by the particular nature (anatomy, aesthetics, sound quality, ontology,...) of the instrument played. Of course. I worked either with the sound of a classical virtuous 16<sup>th</sup> century born high renaissance to baroque instrument or a modern technology electronic synthesizer which are two different worlds or a world of difference. At the same time, both produce sound. My body, as well as the imagination of the body would doubtlessly alter its *way*, noticeable from the quality of movement (sensed and observed). This, even before taking into account the composition itself. I was surprised by this and wanted to get used to it. While deepening our collaborations I would instruct myself not to let the movement go with the nature of the sound (mainly with the cello), but maintain my own movement quality autonomy. I also asked myself whether this instruction was necessary.

Based on the mobility of the instrument, I realized the need to consider well the placement of the musician within the stage. Regarding the physical nature of the instrument, at moments I experienced the musician being less or more physically present on stage. Even though it might seem a marginal thing, it turned out to be an important element of the stage set, our communication and of the piece being made.

### *Reflection*

Usually, we would begin working from my suggestion of an atmosphere, theme, sensation. A thread of sensations and images, an existential feeling (often given form by words) I was busy with then. Once in rehearsal, without talking too much we would make short/long sections of work and shortly reflect on what was done.

With both colleagues, the words we formed during our rehearsals were usually coming from the place of experience. We reflected about our perception of our own production as well as how the proper material met the other's material within the composition, one's imagination and actual perception.

I confess it was me (probably the psychologist in me and having known I would write this text) who emphasized the need to talk and reflect, with the aim to gain some deeper knowledge about our work. I wish to know about how my colleagues work next to me in the intimacy of their inner world also through an other channel than their art being made. And, I am easily confronted – are the words needed at all? I can only say that at some moments the afterwards talk would help to confirm that which was sensed inside and along the work, which again confirmed we were on the right (or rather said – common) track.

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Besides the similarities of the work with both musicians, I have had a few insights about my own functioning. I call them proper tools, meaning that which my body uses. I will try to capture it in its immediate form, as happening in the work itself.

### **Proper tools**

#### *Inspiration*

My body is immediately inspired by the sound. It responds straight away by movement. There is a continuous process of knowing and not knowing how it is responding, based on what it is responding, which is the constant balancing I need to manage whilst being there next to the other. The other is the sound, the other is the colleague with his physical presence.

An interesting thing I have experienced noticing the nature of the emerged images. Making next to the electronics, my body saw different worlds and headed to dive into them, get wet by them. When dancing with the cello music, however, a suggestive push into the extreme bodily positions and moves, with no pictorial or scenic images thereby, yet not being rational neither. Two very different lives of the imagination unwind with the two personalities of sound, of the instrument, of the musician himself.

### *With*

There was a continuous battle while working between my ability to follow, be let by the music and the strong need to keep to my own work. There were moments I found giving my self out to the space, to the sound and not keeping to the proper ground. Of course then feeling dizzy. The tension between being with and keeping it to myself is one of the crucial elements of the collaboration. The sound is movement, thus it must go *with*, but what an erotic and fulfilling sensation when coming to the point when within that with a proper space is created! It is a very special state of liberation in the co-existence, of maintain both (dualities of with and without) at once. And once it happens I could feel it, and once it is gone, I could also feel it. To work with a colleague means actually to place my own solitude within the presence of the other, to conquer my own desire to create with by *letting* it happen, while working present and enjoying it.

### *Choice*

The actual faculty of making choices was sharpened and reconsidered. Also, the work with sound made me more sensitive to perceiving the fineness of the variety of everyday 'non-composed' sounds and how exact and precise they are in their chance composition once I actually *listen* to them. There is an art of choice in instant composition, the ability of allowing the choice happen and making the choice but yes and not from the proper desire. For me, I was working well when the choice was coming from its own flow, when the/my energy was going where the attention was heading.

### *Otherness*

The new knowledge for me also came from my observations of the musicians' working next to me. The timing of the rehearsals, the amount of words and no words during the work, the way of preparing themselves and their instruments,... all of that was informing me about their way of building up and living through this work experience. Instead of saying that I understood their creative processes (for which I wish to collaborate with them for the next fifty years), I got inspired and moved deeply by their way of preparing, meditating, working. Thus, my deep memory of the common work lies in the space and time around the actual work.

*Roberta Štěpánková, dancer, choreograph, psychotherapist*



