

THE NON-MATERIALISM

Marija Ščekić- choreographer and dance producer
Interviewed by Nino Zubčević



From the materials I have, it is obvious that your classical ballet trainings with Štefanija Heller influenced your decision to continue with your dance career?

Mrs Štefanija Heller was teaching me first ballet steps and continued to support my dancers skills for over 15 years. It is a great honour to see Mrs Heller now, at age of 70, being my collaborator in creation of "Sjena". She has greatly helped, during few rehearsals, to refresh my childhood memories by bringing me back to my classical ballet roots on one hand, but also to reveal deep emotions which were hidden during my artistic growth and development into contemporary dance choreographer at Concordia Dance department in Montreal.

The study of electroacoustics with Laurie Radfordt in Montreal and application of sound wave transformation to human bodies in space and time resulted as unique signature in your future choreographies and works.

My first choreography, "Modulations", was created in Montreal in 1996 during my studies of contemporary dance at Concordia Dance department during which I took elective course on Electroacoustics with Laurie Radfordt. It was very important time for me since the idea of sound wave transformation, when applied onto human bodies in space and time, became the basis of all my future creative process in choreography crafting. As I was exploring sound properties such as frequency, amplitude, envelope, timbre, spectrum....., I continued to apply some of these regularities and laws to human movement. The initial idea was to understand each dancer as energy cell itself and to see choreography as a microphone, the organic membrane which filters

all inner vibrations inside dancers and grow them bigger, develop and transform into something that is more clear, and more visible to "naked eye". This way, dancer's can open up a whole microcosms of strictly defined choreography structure and move from small, abstract, invisible inner vibrations within their bodies into big, harmonious and fluid dance movements on stage.

THE SPONTANEITY OF COLLABORATIONS

In correspondence to my previous question, collaborations with composers (Jean-Francois Prud'homme, Sean Kosa, Mario Šulina....) and now with your brother, Zoran Šćekić seem like a logical step further.

Each collaboration was specific in it's nature but, no matter if choreographer and composer are creating separately or through one common structure, it is clear that the product of their collaboration becomes obvious only when performed on stage. First experience, similar to this one was during collaboration with Francois Demers in Montreal, when we created two separate compositions, one for jazz trio and one for dance quartet. I wasn't completely satisfied with the result but that approach definitely affected my future creative process, including recent collaborations with my brother.

Exploration of interrelation which space and time create inside and outside of dancer's body is the theme of almost all your work?

Good choreography is not only achieved through structured dance movements but rather through harmony which dancers' bodies create while moving through structured space, time and movement parameters. For this reason, I do not hold my auditions in favour of external look but emotional maturity, determination, concentration, life experience, artistic sensibility which I believe, all influence the final result or the performance proficiency.

Your creative process is also known to be the process of very detailed analysis of movements which occur inside the moving body of a dancer?

Yes. I urge myself to localize and to define movements which happen inside my dancers before they even start to move in order to understand their own logic, the choice they would normally do if not limited by my own movement structure. Once I understand the way they "think", it is easier to know in what way to approach and how to explain what I "think". This is very difficult way to work, because dancers are not just bodies in space and time, but are sensitive and vulnerable human beings whose level of psycho-physical ability to separate (or integrate) emotions from (and with) their technical expression is what I am mostly interested in.

SCIENTIFIC REFLEX

Free improvisation within strictly defined parameters of space-time-movement is what you understand by "natural harmony between man and nature"

My study of choreography in Montreal has deeply influenced my way of thinking and understanding dance and art in general. I was thought how to "see" raw movements, how to understand what they really mean at the very moment when they are being created. Through self-

analyses of my own work and through works by my fellow students, I was given chance to learn, explore and prove my own ideas, doubts, strengths and weaknesses within supervision of professors and department program. I believe that I continued to carry out this model of artistic growth and self-development which nowadays, is more like scientific reflex towards better understanding of myself and nature and towards creation of balance, of harmony between all compositional elements on stage and finally, towards deeper understanding of human movement in general.

Histeria Nova is actually a project. It is the idea to initiate, promote multimedia projects on national and international level?

Yes. Histeria NOVA is a "single body production house" whose only full-time employee is me myself. It is 24hour job which I had to do for almost 5 years (since I returned from Canada) in order to maintain the quality of my creative work and also my expectations in regards to production standard. It is true that the level of proficiency I am looking for is high, but I also believe that only by not compromising these beliefs and expectations I can manage to create normal conditions under which I hope to live and work in Croatia. Being the only choreographer/dancer who also works as dance producer and invites, hires and pays other free lancers (Croatian and foreigners) is extremely difficult situation in which my social status of being Free Lance Artist is not enough to support all political and legal issues that I have to deal with on a daily basis, starting from negotiations with private sponsors on one side to receiving their money and paying tax to the government as if I was a firm or a company on the other side. This is why I took artistic name "Histeria NOVA" to work as a company by truly being one.

With the help of your brother, the main goal of "Histeria Nova" is to create original works and try to promote Croatian contemporary dance&music by producing them in Croatia and abroad?

That is the goal, but how things have been developing in past years here (artistic scene transforming into show business, music industry controlled by one private production company, no coordination and no collaboration among artists from different companies.....) it seems more and more obvious to realize that this goal is still a utopia, rather than reality. Of course, in spite of that, our major focus is to avoid mainstream and still continue to work towards initial idea.

UNBELIEVABLE WORK CONDITIONS

All Histeria Nova's projects are original ideas and self-produced works with just partially financial support by government and local sponsors?

The work conditions are truly extremely difficult here. It is not unfamiliar to all international art producers that for every new project idea first must be completed (created) and then, offered to the theatres as finished product. In Croatia, this process is not possible because the governmental institutions in culture as well as local sponsors do not approve creative budget but demands finalization of artistic ideas through money which is far from being enough to cover even minimum costs of production- the one which relate towards author's salaries and collaborators' fees. That is ridiculous, because this way, the government is almost forcing Croatian authors to quit their own ideas and to work unprofessionally, and instead of investing their time into creation of original home projects they must be full-time employees for other companies to pay their living costs and use free time to create their own ideas.

In Zadar, you are preparing your new work "Sjena" and the premiere is planned for summer 2004.

Sjena was originally planned to be performed as part of Theatre summer festival in Zadar, however, at last moment and without any explanation by the director of National Theatre House in Zadar, the performance was cancelled. The reasons are still not obvious to anyone since this project was gathering not just international artists (Tadashi Endo-Japan/Butoh Center MAMU-Germany) but was also a project which culturally connected Slavonia and Dalmatia through established collaboration between Histeria Nova, Zadar Dance Ensemble and Digital Media Lab-Zadar where Zoran's music for Sjena was recorded and produced. It is sad that artistic value of this project and possibility for future cultural development of two Croatian regions remained unnoticed by political structures in both cities of Zadar and Đakovo. In spite of that and although no support came from any of these two counties, Sjena remained on track and continued to move towards it's final steps of realization. The first public rehearsal will be as part of Cultural Summer festival in Osijek on 18th June 2004 and I wish to take this opportunity to thank Mrs Jasminka Mesarić and Štefaniija Heller for supporting the organization of this event.

Sjena talks about something "in between" things. Does this mean that your performance is a suggestion of something that is non-material, something that religion would consider being a higher aim, the truth which stands above human life?

Every art work is a suggestion of non-materialism, and Sjena is just a performance by two people, Mr. Tadashi Endo and myself which is not being played to talk about us, to show what is common to us, but to show our opposite movement dynamics and the harmony in between them- a common thing for all living beings on earth.