

Interview with Ulrike Becker, Pirkko Husemann and André Theriault; led by Claudia Henne (RBB Kultur).



Claudia Henne:

The TANZ IM AUGUST motto this year is "Listen!" It is a very unusual motto. One could also say, a very brave motto, given that most of the audience comes to see bodies in motion...

André Thériault:

... and to hear music, maybe even the dancers' breathing. The motto is no headline for a poster or brochure. It is a subject that we recognized in a diverse number of works. As a matter of course artists deal with music, with text. They listen to their own body. We confronted ourselves with this mostly invited productions in which the acoustic element is particularly weighted.

CH:

Ulrike Becker, do I have to assume that I won't be seeing any moving dancers?

Ulrike Becker:

No. "Listen!" is basically an opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which dance has developed in many directions, in many heterogeneous forms. The music – what we hear – was as interesting in ballet, or even later in Modern Dance, as the dance was. People always asked: "To what music?" This has long since changed. Contemporary choreographers have their own approach. Even the use of music has become very varied. Many works are made without music or against the music. That is a sign of contemporary and postmodern dance creations. We have seen that the acoustic element is an issue now. Many artists, when they talked about their new pieces, addressed the issue on their own in the first few sentences. This time productions are also included that can't be subsumed under this topic – this is intended, but it is a common denominator. And it has many facets; it reaches from flamenco, in which sound is created by movement and belongs to the dance in an organic way, up to unusual confrontations with music such as the case in Thomas Hauert's work or those of African groups in which the text level plays a vital role, or in the case of Alice Chauchat who investigates the physically visible effects of the imagination when stimulated by language.

Pirkko Husemann:

"Listen!" also stands for a general tendency in dance. At present there is a strong focus on sensual perception – and acoustic perception belongs to that. In addition there is an increased interest in emotions. If you eliminate your sense of sight, so dominant in our daily lives, this allows for a completely different, more intensive form of aesthetic experience and a different access to emotional states. Thus this motto doesn't just stand for the approach that we found in recent productions; instead, it is representative for a larger development in dance.

CH:

How did the choreographers react to the motto? Was there any feedback?

PH:

We didn't mention it in our talks with artists beforehand, because we wanted to avoid that the artists offer us appropriately adapted concepts. Instead, we saw that – and how – they are working with concert formats, with language, voice, sound and audible

movement material. At first we collected these discoveries, then analyzed the repertoire for possible approaches to hearing and then worked it into a motto. Afterwards a number of responses arrived: it's an exciting subject with many facets and it seems to be accessible for many. For example there are three pieces that formulate an appeal to a social and political consciousness. They deal with subjects such as violence, suffering and a hope for the future. The festival opener by Salia nî Seydou (Burkina Faso) searches for a choreographic expression for human suffering. And a choreographic concert by Faustin Linyekula that addresses the question of the future for people from the Congo, a country that repeatedly had to start over again. In addition we also have EMPIRE by Superamas, a piece that deals with the way violence is transported by the media but with completely different stage aesthetics. This aspect of "Listen!" thus has nothing to do with music or language, but rather with the demand to listen closely and pay attention.

CH:

Another emphasis of this festival is up-and-coming young artists. Is supporting young artists so important to you because there is not enough public support for them?

AT:

It is of central importance for the future of this festival that we support young artists. And there are young artists, but they aren't visible enough. This doesn't just apply to Berlin; it's an international problem. Together with other programmers we are creating projects, for example the EU-project LOOPING that is part of the program this year, in which young artists are specifically supported. My sense is that the choreographers who are now 40 or 45 years old and now define the dance scene also have a need for dialogue with young artists. They also want to be influenced by them, perhaps the way they have already influenced others. This is a very fruitful dialogue.

UB:

In Berlin the attempt to improve the support for young artists in the public funding system was only partially successful, and it shouldn't happen at the cost of established groups. TANZ IM AUGUST has a very good audience that is willing to go though a lot; they are curious, have seen many works, have an opinion and they want to see that developments are being followed up on. We want to use this platform to show young artists, and I hope we can gain a public for that. For the artists it means having a chance and a challenge at the same time.

PH:

It's not just the exchange between the famous and young artists that plays a role here. By working with young artists institutions and festivals are challenged to think in new formats. For example, in our festival program we now suddenly have 30-minute pieces that we will show in combined evenings. That didn't exist before.

CH:

Can you name a few examples of what young artists are working on?

PH:

There is a very funny piece by a Belgian PARTS graduate Pieter Ampe and the Portuguese Guilherme Garrido: STILL DIFFICULT DUET. Both young men obviously had difficulty in their artistic work process and then made this the subject of their work. It ends up that they annoy each other for a half hour until finally you stop laughing, because you see that they are really hurting each other. We are showing this duet as a double-bill with a bizarre solo by a British dancer, Rachel Krische, who did her own piece after attending a workshop with Deborah Hay who was a guest to TANZ IM AUGUST last year.

AT:

Or the work by Daniel Linehan from New York, whose solo is called THIS IS NOT ABOUT EVERYTHING but ironically in fact pivots around everything... literally! He rotates like a Dervish for 30 minutes while drinking water, taking off his clothes, writing a check. And he talks almost the whole time. About the War in Iraq, George W. Bush, love, death, sickness, money... It's really about everything. We are happy to show a work by this young New Yorker again after such a long time. The situation is very difficult there for artists. The Linehan's 30-minute format will be combined with a second piece: one by Oleg Soulimenko and, on the next evening, one by Antonia Baehr. Both of them will be showing works that they made on a commission from Phillip Gehmacher in Vienna. They don't just show their work and research, but they also talk about it at the same time – a clear correspondence to the subject "Listen!"

CH:

You are opening the festival with an African production. Are you making a statement?

UB:

The opening is always a statement. In this case it is tied to the fact that we have been observing developments in Africa for a number of years and what has appeared interesting beyond exoticism has been presented in the festival. In this case we found a large production with political aspirations that they know how to realize with sophisticated artistic means; in the process they don't just report about regional political difficulties or a problematic history. It is about a riot that took place in Burkina Faso when Salia nî Seydou's choreographic center in Ouagadougou was opened; it overshadowed the event. The experience of violence is far more present in African daily life than in Europe. And Salia nî Seydou are artists who deal with this in a comprehensive way. It is no direct representation of an experience of violence; it has many layers. You see violence and pain, but you also see the form and objectivity in the approach. And the driving force is music, also the songs by the singer. So it's a piece that, as I see it, fits for the opening of the festival very, very well.

PH:

Salia nî Seydou insist on the universality of their work. They are not focused on the suffering in Africa, but rather suffering as such – whether it's in front of their or our front door. They don't want to complain about their situation and ask for our understanding or sympathy; they are generally concerned about the experience of violence and pain that everyone knows – even if it usually comes to us through the media, as we now see in the case of Iran. In addition, the piece is a refined choreography and well done. It is primarily a big dance production, visually very attractive, with a special language of movement that has both African and European influences. This is important to emphasize because the European market is desperately searching for choreographers who have something important to say, whose work has a kind of essential urgency that seems to be lacking here. The three African pieces that we are presenting certainly assuage this desire, but they are above all unusual productions that have emanated from very different artistic visions.

CH:

Now we are at another important point: mediation. This year it's important to you and you are offering a workshop. Has this become an urgent, a truly important issue?

UB:

I believe so. We noticed that the audience may see a lot, but it is also getting broader. More and more young people are coming, but also older people who say: "... yes, every-

thing is great here, but I really don't understand it." Those are reactions that we hear after performances or at the sommer.bar. And there are more and more requests for public discussions.

Due to the fortunate development and strengthening of dance science in the last few years the desire for a theoretical discussion has also increased. More and more members of the audience ask questions such as "what am I seeing?", "how can I categorize this?" We have invited the dramaturge Maren Witte who has basically turned this into a business idea and developed this year's audience workshop that addresses two festival productions in an exemplary way. It's all about an introduction to how you can watch and interpret contemporary dance.

AT:

There are also public discussions, similar to the way they were last year, but in a new form developed by artists. It's a suggestion that came from Alice Chauchat, a choreographer who is also in the festival with a new production. In her **IMPERSONATION GAMES** the choreographer, instead of a moderator, poses the questions to three so-called impersonators. They then answer as though they had been the choreographer. Afterwards the audience has the opportunity to pose questions to these impersonators or directly to the choreographer.

PH:

In addition to the workshop we are also offering a series of lectures in cooperation with Doris Kolesch from the FU Berlin. They aren't dance specific, but rather deal with hearing in art and daily life. In addition the American sound artist Brandon LaBelle is giving a workshop with the title „Recording Sounds of Dancing“. At the beginning of the year he did a production for "Deutschlandradio" that one could term a *silent disco*. In the "Maria im Ostbahnhof" he let a group of 100 people dance to their mp3 players with headphones, just like in a club. They heard music, but in the space itself there was no music to be heard. LaBelle then recorded the sound of the dancers, the scraping of their feet, the squeaks of their sneakers, and then turned it into an audible portrait of dance. He will be doing the same thing in the framework of the festival and also give a lecture on acoustic territories. How does Berlin sound in comparison to Bergen in Norway? Or Kreuzberg in comparison to Zehlendorf? And there will also be a lecture by the sociologist Michael Bull on the so-called iPod effect. What happens to our social conditions, our relationships to other people, when we don't hear each other anymore because we always have earplugs in our ears and thus don't talk to one another?

CH:

Artists like to be here because they see other works; that was one of the essential ideas of the TANZ IM AUGUST festival. Giving artists the opportunity to stay longer, to work here and take something with them. Another essential idea was the workshop for dancers. This year you will refrain from doing this for the first time. Why?

AT:

Because there has been a positive development in the last ten years in the city. There are more studios offering larger and more professional workshop programs during the whole year. This is why we would like to re-evaluate this part of the program; in my opinion the need for further education and training isn't the same as it was in the past. TANZ IM AUGUST can offer more specialized things in the future.

CH:

And the money flows into...? Another production?

AT:

For example, with that amount we can co-produce one work. We have four co-productions in the program, from Ivo Dimchev, Juan Domínguez, Eleanor Bauer and Alice Chauchat. This kind of support is also important.

UB:

It will also flow into the support for young artists, because it's cost-intensive. As a rule young artists receive little support from their own country's institutions, have a hard time finding means of production and have less of an audience than their more famous colleagues. That seems to be a more sensible task for TANZ IM AUGUST than educational workshops; in the meantime workshops have been developed locally and internationally to a high level.

CH:

This means that for cultural politics it would be a task to ensure that artists can also produce?

UB:

Absolutely, and in every stage of their career.

AT:

What artists need is money and infrastructure to produce, money to live from and a stage. For example, we don't have enough stages for dance in Berlin. We also see TANZ IM AUGUST as a platform, as a possibility for artists from Berlin to present their work in an international framework. We have a strong Berlin presence at the festival this year – but not primarily because they are from Berlin, but rather because their works or personalities interest us. Even the cooperation with different venues is important to us. The RADIALSYSTEM V and the Sasha Waltz company are a good example. Four "choreographers of the future", as they call them, will be presented in a partnership with the RADIALSYSTEM V and Sasha's company. I hope this will receive a lot of public interest. I believe that people want to see what will come after Sasha Waltz and what kind of young works can be presented at the RADIALSYSTEM V. This is also an important part about communicating about art: making dance visible.