

Pulsing across Europe



Tanz im August on Big Pulse Dance Alliance

Text: Tanz im August | Ruth Riordan

What can festivals do together to strengthen the contemporary dance sector? Big Pulse Dance Alliance is a lively network of festivals committed to meeting the changing demands of dance in Europe.

In 2019, during the ICE HOT Nordic Dance Platform in Reykjavik, a group of like-minded festival directors from contemporary dance organisations came together to explore how, collectively, they may be able to better support a thriving contemporary dance sector. Virve Sutinen, artistic director of Tanz im August, initiated their first meeting. She recounts: “We started with the burning questions we had as festivals and immediately became aware of our common concerns.”

From these discussions, Big Pulse Dance Alliance was born – a partnership of 12 European dance festivals and institutions that was awarded EU Creative Europe co-funding for a 4-year period, spanning 2021 to 2024. At the core of the Big Pulse ethos is sharing and togetherness: it’s through coming together as artists, producers, administrators, curators, directors, experts and academics that they seek to tackle the challenges of the future. While the planning of Big Pulse took place within a pre-Covid world, the value of such a network has been reinforced by the recent large-scale cancellations and disruption. “We concluded there and then that despite the existing diversity of artists and aesthetics in contemporary dance, variety is what is miss-

ing from our big stages”, says Sutinen. “Most of us were also keen on developing new ways of engaging current audiences and reaching out to new ones: the idea of supporting new choreographic concepts for public spaces followed the discussion of how to make dance more visible to the general public.”

Big Pulse’s first artists

Four exciting artists in transition to scaling up their work, Oona Doherty (Northern Ireland/UK), Silvia Gribaudo (Italy), Marco da Silva Ferreira (Portugal) and Amala Dianor (France), were selected as the first choreographers to be co-produced and toured at several Big Pulse partner festivals in the coming years. Oona Doherty’s compelling works, such as her breakthrough piece “Hard To Be Soft – A Belfast Prayer”, which was part of the Tanz im August programme in 2019, have sparked international attention, earning her multiple awards and rave reviews. Over in Italy, for nearly two decades Silvia Gribaudo has focused her artistic research on the social impact of bodies, be they trained, oversized or aging, and has demonstrated how diversity and humour can bring freedom to the stage. Marco da Silva Ferreira will be working with a cast of over ten dancers, drawing from European folk-dance footwork to urban dance styles in search of a rebellious and carnival-like collective body. With his new work “Siguifin”, meaning “magical monster” in the Bambara language, Amala Dianor brings together three West-African choreographers and nine talented African dancers to construct an exquisite-corpse-inspired multi-faceted



“Woods” von Clarice Lima, Catarina Saraiva, Aline Bonamim und Ylva Fajdiga © Patricia Araujo

being. The Big Pulse partners are looking forward to welcoming these artists to their bigger stages.

Moving to the great outdoors

In order to extend dance to public outdoor spaces and support artists interested in developing portable, ecologically aware choreographic ideas, Big Pulse released an open call and received more than 250 applications. Following a rigorous selection process, three projects were ultimately chosen. "ALIEN", by award-winning Finnish choreographer Taneli Törmä/LOCATION X (Finland/Denmark), is a touring concept that will be rehearsed and performed by local dancers in public squares. The ongoing project "Bosque/Woods" brings together Clarice Lima (Brazil), Catarina Saraiva (Portugal), Aline Bonamim (Brazil) and Nina Fajdiga (Slovenia), who continue to blur the lines between their diverse practices of performance, choreography, dramaturgy and curatorship. Visual artist Helena Byström (Sweden) and choreographer Anna Källblad (Sweden) have brought their works to places as diverse as sports arenas, a nuclear power plant and a cathedral, and with "City Horses" they continue their site-specific practice of telling stories based on the collaboration and exchange with the site. The selected artists present bold, captivating choreography that celebrates creative imaginations and the power of the body in motion. They each include the engagement of local dancers, mov-

ers, amateurs and professionals in their projects to realise their vision anew in each festival location.

Towards a healthier dance sector

As Europe is now entering the post-pandemic phase, the question of well-being in the dance community is strongly present. The sector is committed and ambitious beyond its resources, often taking for granted the long hours, unpaid work and continuous uncertainties. The Big Pulse partners have a keen understanding of the pressures and challenges that have faced artists and all those working across the dance sector. With the desire to address urgent issues and create a sustainable working environment, the Big Pulse partners will be introducing a series of meetings, as well as mentoring and exchange programmes.

For the next three years Tanz im August / HAU Hebbel am Ufer will be the leading partner of Big Pulse Dance Alliance. Project manager Eduardo Bonito has just moved to Berlin to lead the project together with the partners. As a founder of several performing arts networks, consultant for institutions in Latin America and Europe and as artistic director for festivals including the Panorama Festival in Rio de Janeiro and the BAC – Biennale of the Arts of the Body, Image and Movement of Madrid, Bonito has plentiful experience and is looking forward



"ALIEN" von Taneli Törmä – LOCATION X © Adey



to diving into Big Pulse. “I am excited by the possibilities that this project offers to artists. Personally, I am keen on developing sustainable touring practices and artistic concepts that are connected to the location and its locals,” says Bonito. And although it’s only just started, Big Pulse is already attracting attention: “Other European festivals have expressed interest in joining us, and we are looking for ways to meet this interest in the coming years. The long-term aim was to establish a wider network of dance festivals after the project, but now it looks like this should happen earlier.” Following a year of uncertainties, Big Pulse Dance Alliance paves the way forward.

Big Pulse Dance Alliance is co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

Partner Festivals / Institutions of Big Pulse Dance Alliance: Tanz im August / HAU Hebbel am Ufer (Germany), Dance Umbrella (UK), Dublin Dance Festival (Ireland), Julidans (Netherlands), New Baltic Dance (Lithuania), ONE Dance Week (Bulgaria), Torinodanza Festival (Italy), Zodiak – Side Step Festival (Finland), Sismògraf Dance Festival (Catalonia – Spain), International Dance Festival TANEC PRAHA (Czech Republic), CODA Oslo International Dance Festival (Norway) and Danscentrum Sverige (Sweden)

For further information, visit bigpulsedance.eu or contact Eduardo Bonito (Big Pulse Project Manager) on bigpulse@tanzimaugust.de