

D A N C E O N

...it has to be dance...

By Claudia Henne

I don't remember exactly what I expected or imagined when Madeline Ritter and I agreed that I would accompany the brand-new DANCE ON ENSEMBLE on its journey, conducting interviews and writing articles for its programmes. I do remember very much looking forward to speaking with dancers over 40, listening to them and getting to know them. I didn't care where or for whom they had danced before, because the enduring strict separation between ballet and contemporary dance seems so unnecessary and unproductive to me – it has done for years. Are there even still dancers who are only able to dance classically, or would want to? Who, as they grow older, can no longer cope with the physical demands of their job? Are there really no choreographers who create work with the evolution of the body in mind? Such questions are seldom asked publicly, but they are inevitable for all those who reach this stage of their dancing life. They are forced to confront societal conventions and expectations that affect them on a deeply personal level and can be profoundly alienating. Most dancers do nothing but dance from earliest childhood. It defines every fibre of their being till the end of their life.

The same is true for the six dancers who were selected for the new DANCE ON company. I have grown to know them as strong personalities who know that they want to keep dancing, who are experts in the world of dance, and who, as the saying goes, have gotten about in the world:

- who know how to find their way in different languages, theatres, cities; who have learned how to cope;
- who (need to) take care of their body every day, for it is their capital, their livelihood;
- who need to be extremely adaptable while at the same time retaining their personality, because what counts, after the body, is individuality;
- who are lonely but also part of a big global family, always meeting someone backstage or front of house whom they have worked with, rehearsed with, danced with before, somewhere, sometime in the past;
- who are highly experienced at being in a group, seldom performing alone;
- who practice and rely on tolerance, in lots of different ways;



- who in the past have survived on very little money, and might have to again and some point in the future;
- who only know the future as a short-term plan;
- who know that everything can be over at any minute;
- who are experts in pain, not only physical pain;
- who have weathered rivalries, disappointments, goodbyes. So many goodbyes that they are true experts of farewells;
- who are not famous enough to have made it into the dance history books;
- who nevertheless know exactly what they are capable of and that there would be no dance without them;
- who have developed an acute sense for situations;
- who are still curious;
- who couldn't be more different;
- who like to laugh together;
- who can make do with one suitcase and very little sleep;
- who would like to have to say fewer goodbyes;
- and who still never want to stop dancing (at least for now).



Photos: Dorothea Tuch

I took pleasure in my conversations with them and enjoyed reflecting on all the things they told me. The DANCE ON ENSEMBLE is a collection of worldly-wise movement specialists with a lot of life experience, who are likely to start stretching in the middle of a conversation. They inhabit their bodies differently to the rest of us. Arrive, depart... but never stand still. Except on stage.

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