



YOU ARE HALF OF THE PIECE

by Linda Isaksson

If you put ten dancers, ten musicians, five choreographers and five composers from just about every corner of the globe in a room together, something interesting is bound to happen. 30 bodies, 30 minds and at least a thousand different ways of collaborating – anything is possible. Welcome to Choreosound 09.

What is it that makes a project like Choreosound 09 a successful project? Is it having good funding, excellent staff and well organized planning? It is all of the above, of course. But most of all, it seems, it is up to the participants and in what way they are willing to take part and try and work together. To find the courage to let go of prestige and pride, take risks and just see what happens in the moment. To be able to trust one another and try to be open minded. Collaboration is all about communication – that is what everyone keeps saying. But how do you go about to find that way of communicating?

“You are half of the piece”. That is what a successful collaboration should feel like according to one of the lecturers of Choreosound 09. Maybe so. Is it likely to achieve that kind of collaboration in this amount of time with these very qualified, yet strong minded artists? Is achievement at all interesting? Or is it all about the process of collaboration? These are a few questions that have come to mind while working with documenting this project. The answers are not all here to be found, but rather somewhere inside each person who took part of it all. And furthermore in the projects and collaborations that most likely will be the spin off-effect of it. This is an attempt to summarize Choreosound 09. A project of collaboration in itself.



PHOTO: MALIN ARBENSSON

Ari Kauppila and Benjamin Quigley.

Expectations and Possibilities

Choreosound 09 is a project which started in the mind of Swedish choreographer Marika Hedemyr several years ago. She had a wish to deepen her own comprehension regarding the connections between contemporary dance, music and composition. In dialogue with colleagues it became even more obvious that the need to confer and explore these issues was evident. Marika wanted to create a forum where discussions as well as artistic experimenting concerning these topics could take place. After a lot of work planning, funding, recruiting and putting all the pieces together Choreosound 09 was finally realized. 30 participants from all over the

world came to Gothenburg on September the 24th 2009 with a week of work, debate, stimulation and hopefully valuable artistic insights ahead of them.

On the first night of Choresound 09 Marika Hedemyr, artistic director, hosted a welcoming party at her studio Dansbyrån where most of the participants joined. The atmosphere in the room is filled with anticipation and everyone is introducing themselves and chatting. In her welcoming speech Marika performs a small dance piece, introduces the staff and most of all welcomes everyone to the project.

– I am so happy that we made this happen. It is an opportunity to find out how we can collaborate with each other as well as an opportunity to challenge ourselves, says Marika.

Ten dancers, ten musicians, five choreographers and five composers were chosen to join Choresound 09. The musicians and the dancers could apply, the composers and the choreographers were invited. Three of the participants from Sweden, Anders Rimpi, Daniel Skoglund and Peter Svenszon, had slightly different expectations:

– I have no expectations. I do not want to perform or achieve anything. But I do want to think outside the box and explore things. It is both scary and alluring, says Swedish choreographer Peter. Anders Rimpi, composer and singer, goes on:

– I am really eager to work more with dancers since I have had some very satisfying experiences from it before. I am interested in writing music for a specific purpose, we do use the same metaphors, for example fast, small or dense. The only difference is that they mean different things for us. Daniel Skoglund, composer, continues:

– I had my doubts regarding this project. I said yes at first and then I turned the offer down when Marika Hedemyr approached me. It is not uncomplicated for me to work with dancers. But on the other hand, the complicated things often turn out to be the most interesting ones. Now I look forward this unique opportunity, Daniel Skoglund says.



Karin Hedín, working session at Oceanen.

Marika also invited two mentors to join the project, choreographer Lotta Melin and composer Paul Bothén. Their job was to be an outside eye, to observe, to support and make the connections within the processes in the different work-

ing sessions. Marika Hedemyr asks them why they accepted the position as mentor:

– How could I say no to this? It is such a luxury to be here, Lotta Melin says. Paul Bothén agrees and continues:

– I find these topics so interesting, even though I have no experience from working with dancers. I am really looking forward to talk about the different methods we can use for collaboration.

The First Days of Inspiration and Work

The schedule of Choresound-09 consisted roughly out of four different master classes given by very prominent artists from different fields, each with a task for the participants to apply during the working sessions that followed. Each day ended with a summing up session led by the mentors at the studio Dansbyrån. The participants were divided by Marika Hedemyr, Paul Bothén and Lotta Melin into different groups on different days, so that various processes and new ways of working could take place. On two occasions – Sunday at Dansbyrån and on the final day, Thursday, at the venue Pustervik – an audience was invited to view the sketches that had been done.

The first master class was held by Spanish composer and former dancer Charo Calvo and was called Sound, Kinetic Energy and Dramaturgy. Charo Calvo took the listeners on a journey through her impressive career as a dancer and a composer for stage as well as the movie and multimedia industry. Since the mid 1980's Charo Calvo has been working with Belgian director and choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and she shows several film clips, for example from their early work in 1991 in the well known dance company Ultima Vez. She has in addition to this collaborated on several occasions with the Belgian artist and director Jan Fabre and she also shows examples of these works.

Charo Calvo considers herself to be good at finding the connection between choreography and sound, due to the different perspectives she has as both former dancer and composer.

When it comes to how you collaborate and work through your differences in artistic collaboration it is difficult to speak in general terms, according to Charo Calvo:

– Communication is the most important thing, she says. It is everything. We as artists, can say the same things, but in different layers. We have to take risks. After the two and half hour long lecture she finishes off by saying:

– We are not doctors, we do not know the truth, Charo Calvo states.

The participants of Choresound-09 had some different views on the master classes as well as the working sessions. German choreographer Stephanie Schober on the importance of master classes before the working sessions:

– When you do not know each other, meeting others and working together can be somewhat painful. The master classes in the beginning of the week were really helpful in

that way. You get some tools to try and use all the resources and instruments that you have been given, Stephanie Schober says.

Swedish dancer Sara Ruddock also found the master classes worthwhile especially since there was such a wide spectra of lecturers. She did nevertheless wish for more time to talk and reflect:

– There is so much to gain from just listening to each other, Sara Ruddock says. I actually think that we should have had proper group discussions after the working sessions each day, to get everyone's perspective on what had been going on during the day.

Cecilia Roos on processes and interpretation

The second master class, Interpretation – A Tool or a Method? was held by Swedish professor in dance interpretation, Cecilia Roos. Cecilia Roos shared with the group her assorted views on the term interpretation as well as her theories regarding a dancer's process concerning movement material. On the topic of reflecting on one's work and on the working process, Cecilia Roos shared a story from her very early days as a dancer:

– Something opened up to me just then, a new world of language. The discussions truly made me understand the differences in how everyone translate or interpret a movement, Cecilia Roos says. She continues:

– There is not only one way of doing things or one way to describe the process, she says. Everyone has their own experience and everyone is carrying their own truth.

During the last part of the lecture Cecilia Roos discussed her point of view concerning collaboration between the dance field and the music field today, compared to twenty years ago. And that difference does seem to be quite substantial. Cecilia Roos expresses a climate of collaboration that was quite flourishing back in the day. The dialogue between the different artists seemed to be very close and the processes as well. Today there are no natural meeting points and there is no money to fund collaborations of this kind, she finds.

– I am so looking forward to see what will come out of this laboratory week. It would be of greatest value to me if you could formulate a programme from your experiences and your thoughts on ways of collaboration here, Cecilia Roos says in the end.

Views on performing, working and listening

Before a summary one night, there was time to talk to Kiriakos Spyrou, a musician from Greece, and Ásgeir Helgi Magnússon, a dancer from Iceland, regarding achievement and experimenting on the floor.

– There are always people watching, even if it just yourself. It is in the task itself, in the framing of the performance. And that is not necessarily a bad thing, it brings awareness into the work, Kiriakos Spyrou says. Ásgeir Helgi Magnússon

sees eye to eye with Kiriakos Spyrou, and continues:

– It has to do with accepting one's abilities and to perform within one's possibilities, Ásgeir Helgi Magnússon says.

Both of them would have wished for more time to work on the floor together, even if the master classes were helpful to get everyone on the same page for the day.

– The discussions after the summing up have been the



Working session.

most valuable to me. That is where the real sharing takes place, says Ásgeir Helgi Magnússon. Swedish dancer Sara Ruddock offered another point of view over coffee at Pustervik:

– It has been somewhat difficult working in the groups because it takes time to get to know each other. If there had been more time in the beginning of the week for playful exercises and just trying things out before actually working, it would have been different. It takes time to create an atmosphere that is safe and allowing, and that is crucial in a project of this kind, Sara Ruddock claims.

Another Swedish dancer, Lisa Fahlén, also found the time limitations in the working sessions a bit of a challenge, but for her, collaboration itself was the most challenging part:

– I am used to work very independently and making all my decisions alone, she says. It has been truly interesting and rewarding working this closely with others and I am looking forward to do it again. So many ideas have sprung to mind during this week. I might even start to choreograph others after this experience.

Chop the head off!

British choreographer Nigel Charnock was the third guest lecturer to visit Choresound-09. With him the day had a slightly different agenda. It began with a dance session to which everyone, not only dancers, was welcome to join. Several of the musicians joined in.

The energy in the studio at Musikens Hus is high, everyone seems a bit tense, not knowing what this experience will bring to the table. Nigel Charnock says that he likes being observed and invites the photographers present to do their work. It appears that it is important to him that everyone in

the room is comfortable with what is going on. He persists upon that if you do not feel comfortable by doing a movement, just stop. Nigel Charnock is showing the participants different playful games during the warm-up session. A cluster of people move around in the studio, everyone with a goal in sight, trying eagerly to get hold of someone else. Everybody is laughing and screaming. It is great fun to watch, and Nigel Charnock cries loudly:

– Move, rather than get it right! Do not think! Chop the head off!



PHOTO: MALIN ARNENSON

Working session at Dansbyrån Studio.

Constantly moving around the room, observing and instructing Nigel Charnock finishes off with a calm meditation session, which everyone really seems to enjoy. As a bystander it is quite enjoyable to watch. Soothing even.

Thoughts over lunch

During the lunch hour an opportunity to talk two dancers, Gilda Stillbäck from Sweden and Ásgeir Helgi Magnússon from Iceland, is given. Gilda has a cold and was therefore not participating in the working session with Nigel Charnock.

– It was very interesting to watch, even though I would have loved to join in. Nigel is a very special choreographer, not very organic but rather mixing everything into something new. You get a different perspective from watching and I feel that I can benefit from this also, Gilda Stillbäck says.

Ásgeir Helgi Magnússon claims that the working sessions during the weekend have been both interesting and exhausting. He and Gilda discuss the difficulties in the groups and that there sometimes have been several layers of both expectations and artistic integrity that has to be peeled off in order to really get something done.

“I do not understand dance!”

In the afternoon Nigel Charnock’s master class Popular Music a Part of the Scenic Representation begins. Again it is more physical than intellectual. More fun and games and it seem to be exercises in trust and group dynamics more than anything else. The participants get to lift each other and move each other about in the room. Later on some of them

are blindfolded and the rest can do whatever they feel like. Again, there are also numerous vocal exercises, something that everyone really seems to enjoy.

Nigel Charnock uses the last hour to talk a bit about himself. He is a trained actor and had no intention of ever becoming a dancer. He declares that his art therefore is much more about content than form and that he is really inspired by words, even if his pieces often are silent. He has his own view on dance:

– I really do not understand dance – not to this day, he says bluntly. I can appreciate it, but I do not really know what it is for and why. I understand why people do it, but not why anyone would watch it!

Together with Lloyd Newson, Nigel Charnock founded the very successful dance company DV8. It was formed because of a special reason:

– We formed DV8 so that people who had never seen dance before actually could get something out of it. To find a connection between the people watching and what we were doing on stage, Nigel Charnock claims.

He goes on by briefly describing his attitude toward using recorded music in his improvised performances. He is mostly using recorded music because in that way he can get exactly what he wants: To bring a new dimension into to the work. Even though there are royalties to pay it is not by far as expensive as to work with composers and live musicians. There is more than one musician in the room who looks a bit offended by this notion. Nigel Charnock does however wish to improvise more with musicians in the future.

“I am Not a Collaborating Man”

Swedish celebrated composer Sven-David Sandström was the last one to give a master class during Choreosound- 09. It was called *Orchestral Work for Dance and How to Share an Artistic Landscape*. The ambience in the room is almost ceremonial at first. This does however change later on, when Sven-David Sandström expresses his views on what the collaboration between choreographer and composer should be like. Sven-David Sandström began his master class by describing various episodes of his career and particularly his collaboration with dancer Per Jonsson. A film clip from a piece at Dansens Hus in Stockholm, where the two had worked together, is shown.

– You are half of the piece, Per used to tell me. That is what a successful collaboration should feel like, says Sven-David Sandström.

Sven-David Sandström thinks it is crucial that you choose carefully who you work with, since not all collaborations are successful ones. He talks about the importance of trust to enable a beneficiary working situation. At the same time he is straightforward with his opinions. Straightforward in a way that makes a few people in the room frown:

– I am not a collaborating man. If someone wants to employ me, I do what I want to do. I am just honest – and

very strong minded. I write a piece and bring it to the choreographer. That is how it always works, claims Sven- David Sandström.

Sven-David Sandström is getting personal and reveals stories about his childhood and how he was somewhat of an outsider. He illustrates that a feeling of revenge is from where some of his creative work has had its origin. He claims that having something to say is the most important thing as an artist.

– Art should provide you with something new inside, says Sven-David Sandström. It should fill you with something, even if you do not know what and you might get scared – that is what it should do.

The Last Day

On the very last day of Choreosound- 09, there was a public demonstration at Pustervik followed by a club. During the



PHOTO: ANNA VON BRÖMSESEN

Public Demo at Pustervik.

two last days the participants have been working in the same groups and Marika Hedemyr and the two mentors Paul Bothén and Lotta Melin have chosen some of the pieces from the previous summing up sessions, to be a part of the demonstration. The artists have also had the chance to say what pieces they want to share with an audience. A new vibration, a certain edge, enters now. Even though the week has been all about experimenting, something happens when you enter a black box theatre and there is an audience present. Amanda Cole, composer from Australia, says:

– It feels good to have an audience tonight. That is why I am working, to share it with people. This experience has given me the confidence to work more with dancers and choreographers which I had not really done before. Now I see what is possible to do, it has given me a selection of options.

Lotta Melin is feeling very satisfied with the week, even if her position as a mentor did not turn out exactly the way she planned:

– It was difficult. I felt needed, but maybe not in the way that I predicted. I was so eager to share my own experience in order to help the groups, but there has not really been time to

work in that way. Everyone has been very focused on doing their own work, she says.

Lotta Melin agrees that a new feeling is in the air on the day of the Public Demo, but she claims that it has not been the case throughout the week:

– In the beginning it might have been some showing off going on in some groups, but that is to be expected when you not yet know each other. Very quickly I thought that an atmosphere of generosity and warmth was present. I found many artists very brave when it came to breaking new ground.

Lotta Melin feels that it has been a privilege to be allowed to sneak a peak when these artists have been working. Especially since she also has been involved in putting the different groups together:

– We anticipated that the working processes would be more of a challenge in some groups and perhaps run more smoothly in others. But the funny thing is that things do not really turn out the way you think, Lotta Melin says laughing.

On Marika Hedemyr's mind

A few hours before the Public Demo at Pustervik, Marika Hedemyr has a few minutes to spare.

– It feels like the sun has been shining on us this whole week. I am walking around with a big smile on my face, she says.

Marika Hedemyr is indeed very happy, but also tired. The week has been intense and there are constantly things to take care of.

– The one thing I have learned working with this project, is the significance of having good people around you. I have been able to delegate and let things go in a way that I have never done before.

Marika Hedemyr was at first planning to be a participant of Choreosound as a choreographer, but realized along the way that it was not possible:



PHOTO: MALIN ARNÉSSON

Marika Hedemyr during a working session.

– I could not have done it all. It was of course a bit frustrating at first. I was so eager to work with the others on the floor! But since I found my role, it was a most valuable experience for me.

All of the participants have been extremely focused on

their work, according to Marika Hedemyr. Even if there have been difficulties in some groups, they have shaken it off and just moved on in most impressive way. There were things that had to be taken off the schedule, for example a larger group discussion to sum up the whole week:

– Everyone has so much valuable reflections, but it just was not possible to fit a group discussion in the programme. The experience of Choreosound 09 will go on in all of us – participants, staff and volunteers. Hopefully there will be some positive spin-off effects, she says.

When documenting Choreosound 09 the same question has been asked over and over again: What is it that you will bring with you from this experience? Marika Hedemyr's answer is immediate:

– What is it that you want to express with your art? That is the question that it all boils down to. That is the starting point for every artist and that is also what this week has been about in my opinion, she says before running along to the next chore.

“Inside you have it all - you need others to get it out”

The question whether successful collaboration is possible to achieve in a project like this or not does not seem as relevant anymore. If so – who can be the judge of that? Successful

collaboration means so many different things and take so many different shapes and forms. One thing is clear however – it takes a lot of time, and even more effort, to get anywhere at all. There is no easy method to get people on the same page when it comes to collaboration. Everyone brings so much to the table. Who will sort it all out? In this project, 30 artists from different artistic fields were put together for a specific reason, to be allowed to experiment and explore on the floor together. It is of course a remarkable opportunity. When people come together, share ideas and thoughts, and try to find new ways of working, extraordinary things will happen. And they did.

Antti Leinonen, accordionist from Finland, expressed it in a better way after the Public Demo, the very last night of Choreosound- 09:

– Inside you have it all – you need others to get it out! I have so many ideas in my head now. You get so much from just being with other people. I feel a lot more experimental than before and I am very eager to include movement in my performances, says Antti Leinonen with a huge smile on his face.

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PHOTO: ANNA VON BRONSSSEN

Public Demo at Pustervik.