



MINDS SWARM UP: DANCING IN THE ZERO YEARS

*An interview with **Rio Rutzinger**, artistic director of ImPulsTanz Workshops+Research, about programming the world's largest format of its kind, about dancers' passion and precariate, the importance of social exchange as social and political necessity, and the possibilities of theoretical work in dance pedagogics.*



corpus: At this year's ImPulsTanz, you offer 200 workshops. How do you prepare the programme? How do you select the instructors?

Rio Rutzinger: Our programming is composed of different viewpoints. We have such a wide spectrum because we really want to address many people. We want to bring many people to dance, and to present dance in its entire multiplicity. There are matters which I myself find very intriguing and others I'm personally less interested in, but of which we know that it's good if we offer them. Principally I find it important that the workshop supervisors themselves have a certain interest, a concern they want to explore. That makes for another kind of communication.

corpus: How did this programming develop?

Rutzinger: Actually it began as a festival like from a dance studio. With the same things dance studios still have today: Modern Dance, Jazz dance, a bit of Afro dance – and therefore percussion, too. Today's percussion courses still are a relic from when we began. There always are people – professional dancers, too – who like to sit in on a drum class in the evening in order to calm down. That's why these classes have kept their place.

We had to give up others, like Flamenco or step-dance. The visitors of those classes never were interested in other courses or even went to the cafeteria to have a talk with others. However, exchange is an essential part of our festival. It's important to me to have everything take place in Vienna's Arsenal area. It's the only way of creating easy possibilities for lots of encounters. I want the doors to be open and that the cafeteria is situated on the way in the centre. Encounters should take place effortlessly.

Strong life concepts

corpus: How did you get to programme the workshops?

Rutzinger: I started out in the workshop office – but I'd never had anything to do with dance before.

corpus: And then you began to take workshops yourself ...?

Rutzinger: (laughs) Never! In the beginning my motivation was a purely social one. I like being together with people, and there always were lots of very amicable and exceptional people among the dancers. I wanted to know what these people do: Why do they want to dance, why choreograph? I watched and listened a lot, and I asked very, very many questions. The way how choreographers and dancers lead their lives, how they handle life, seems to be a really strong social concept to me. They enter precarious life circumstances because they follow their desire. Those life concepts are only possible if someone is filled with passion and has urgent concerns.

corpus: Have people, passions and concerns changed in the course of time?

Rutzinger: What has changed in my view – and of course that's a generalisation, also because I'm continuously confronted with such masses here – is that now the dancers and dance lovers begin much earlier to choreograph and to think about making pieces. In the past I met dancers, now I meet a mixture of dancers and dance-makers. This reflects in many ways. In former times the "big dream" could maybe last longer. If you immediately begin to choreograph and to do stage work, you soon realise that you have to become part of a system.

corpus: Especially the dancers in the stipendiate programme "danceWeb" come from all over the world. What knowledge do the different people have about contemporary dance?

Rutzinger: We often have seen that, e.g., danceWeb people from Africa who were living near a French culture institute knew more about dance than many Europeans because they've watched all the institute's videos. It's very intriguing for the danceWeb mentors to meet people who know their stuff and therefore ask questions. People want to learn from each other – and mentors, too. I also discuss these things with them. Dealing with such a large group of young people for five weeks only makes sense if they themselves are really interested in it.

corpus: Do you know how the biographies of danceWebbers go on?

Rutzinger: Yes, we're very interested in that. There are participants who take exception to this supsize of dance at danceWeb. Here they make the experience that there are 40 people apart from them who every day would give up everything for dance, and they maybe find out that they're even more interested in film, architecture, or their family, so they don't go on. Some may not continue dancing, but are active in the field. There's more possibilities today: You can do research or write, there are institutions and Internet media. It's still precarious, but there have been some changes. Alas, the space for art and dance in newspapers becomes less and less, but on the other hand there are more possibilities of writing and reflecting.

Dancing as theory?

corpus: You once said that you're critical with regard to theoretical formats because you don't want it to become "too scientific". What do you mean by that?

Rutzinger: In a sense, we certainly offer too little theory. On the other hand, theory isn't so easily accepted at ImPulsTanz. People want to dance.

corpus: This leads to another question: What does one understand by theory? One could also call the 200 workshops theory. There is no mediation without theoretical claims. Mediation in itself is theory already, and in this case the physical is part of the theoretical discourse.

Rutzinger: We hold discussions with the danceWeb mentors in the Arsenal. We take up issues like the discrepancy between dance production and education or ask questions like "What is authenticity in work?" or "What are titles?" I find this kind of discourse immensely important. I also want to develop this form of discourse further.

When I try to keep everything else in the Arsenal in a flat hierarchy then this also holds true for the theoretical discussion. I want to create an encouraging approach. Reflexion is an extremely important issue in contemporary dance creation. In the research projects there's lots of collective thinking and research. Aesthetic and sociopolitical questions are being discussed via the medium of dance.

corpus: Theory may offer models for thinking differently about the various techniques – structured formal techniques, techniques which offer more open systems or that deal with perception. One could also maintain that ballet was a theory-heavy method, a closed formal (language) system and a contemporary technique, that it was wild poetics creating connections with other disciplines.

Rutzinger: Yes, that opens up other vistas. At the same time I wish that contemporary dance would put theory in motion, too. After all, the really exciting thing about contemporary dance is that it's no longer just about pure forms but that something new is created out of those forms with the help of different methods. Moreover, contemporary dance is only rarely codified but mostly personified. The question is not whether I'm offering contemporary dance at all, but rather: contemporary dance by and with whom?

Technique and open systems

corpus: How does one prepare a programme for the needs of dancers and choreographers? How can you account for future possibilities, the future itself? Or do you believe that pedagogics can only show what's there and that the artists themselves have to develop it further?

Rutzinger: In my opinion, this question cannot be answered today. I'm more interested in breaching it again and again. Every year there's this argument: What is contemporary dance? Should we even call it dance any longer? Every year we get questions like: Why are we doing dance courses? What is the profession of the contemporary dancer? What does this profession have to do with "dance" as we've been understanding this term for a long time? Or: Does it make any sense at all to keep learning technique?

corpus: "The body as an open system" – what's your opinion on that?

Rutzinger: There are so many ways of learning. In Jazz or Modern Dance you're learning a form. With other techniques you're learning that it's important how you're doing something and how you yourself can evaluate and accept it. No contemporary teacher nowadays will say: "You'll do it now like I say" but rather: "Do it like you do it". It's a conscious effort of mine to invite many teachers who esteem technique and have different approaches to it, and who are very convinced of their cause without being exclusive. It's very important for me to find people who'll also have a look at the lessons in other classes.

corpus: Do you think that through dance technique one may learn about different possibilities of translating content?

Rutzinger: The beautiful thing about these contemporary techniques is that they offer open systems without imposing or enforcing anything. But this needs teachers who can take it. Any form of openness makes it more difficult, any form of subtlety makes it more complicated. In our research projects the different levels of reflexion are formulated and collectively explored, too. Thus people with different needs can choose what's important for them at the moment.

Exchange of opposites

corpus: How do you see the relation between amateurs and professionals?

Rutzinger: Naturally, lectures where there's lots of moving and dancing get booked more than those which devote more time to reflexion. I think it's important that both exist. Basically, dance should reach as many people as possible. Once they come here, they might decide to try out something else the next time around. Through dance they explore the body, and that's important for our society. You don't have to go to the football ground every time you've got to relieve your aggressions. There are people who want to sweat because it feels good. They're not coming because of the art, but they still get in contact with art. Dancing is different from bicycling or running. I hold this alternative kind of physical discourse to be very important because it opens up a lot.

corpus: So you wish to create possibilities with this heterogeneous, integrative setup where people can discover something new.

Rutzinger: Yes – we're also creating a potential audience for this field of art, and at the same time we want to enable people to get into contact with themselves and others in a different way. In a sense this is my social or political concern. I'm thinking about this a lot when I invite teachers and think about the scene in the Arsenal. Therefore I'm also interested in keeping the wide distribution. Otherwise, it would become preaching to proselytes. Of course, the discourse within the art field is very important. But others know better how to do it than I do. What I'm good at is creating a setting where encounters and communication take place which otherwise wouldn't do so.

corpus: But you don't want to imagine a symposium as a place of encounter?

Rutzinger: What I don't like about symposiums is the formality. You talk to people with a microphone and a table in between. I think the circle is a fitting format for ImPulsTanz. Or people sit together on the floor and exchange themselves. Without mike and table. Where else have you got the chance of so many people with similar interests sitting together ... Naturally that's very heterogeneous. But there rarely will be such a clash of opinions just because there's so different people there. I really believe that's the only chance of getting on. Perhaps then we'll be able

sometime to answer questions like: "What does it mean to be a contemporary dancer in the Zero Years?"

(This interview was held by **Sabina Holzer** and **Helmut Ploebst**,
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