

## **Article 1: An interview with Claire Russ**

Published in Dance UK News in British Association of Choreographers Journal 1999

### **Choreographers' Notes - Claire Russ is interviewed**

#### **What influenced your decision to become a choreographer?**

I have always had a deep love of the human body and its expressivity. That's it really. I had an early infatuation with Margot Fonteyn and enjoyed choreographing dances for pantomimes when I was thirteen. I never cared about the stories of ballets but I was obsessed with the physicality and musicality. Later on the experience of different cultures stimulated me. Once I danced for two weeks with old Chinese women on a mountainside in North East China; it was as if a cluttered palate of cultural conventions was cleared and a deeper response was available to me. In 1986, just before I decided to choreograph I worked in an economic consultancy doing research in commodity markets worldwide. That clarified things!

#### **Did you have any strong role models in your developing years? Who?**

All my years are developing years! Two role models were Mathilde Monnier and Rui Horta, who I first met through the Place Theatre's 'Turning World' season of dance. I subsequently saw both of them at work and particularly Rui Horta taught me how to lead a choreographic process generously. Belgian choreographer Alain Platel, and German choreographer Susanne Linke have also been important influences and like many others, I revere Pina Bausch.

#### **What has been the high point of your career to date?**

Doing my lipstick next to Shirley Bassey in the cloakroom at Windsor Castle at the first 'Cool Britannia' reception for artists given recently by the Queen. No question! – I also had a brief exchange with Michael Caine – and heard him say "Hullo, my name's Michael Caine" for real.

#### **What is the most difficult aspect of your job?**

Creation itself – the work takes place on so many levels. Working out what's going on conceptually, inspiring the dancers, steering the whole project, and squeezing a three-month process into nine weeks. These are also undoubtedly the best times of my life.

#### **What are you most grateful to when working?**

Dancers and collaborators. The deep life of a work is formed collaboratively.

#### **What sort of work would you like to do in the future?**

Interesting work that raises new enquiry.

#### **What single thing would improve your working life?**

Access to a Swiss Bank Account with cash for creation and for living in it. Dance is a romance industry and a low paid profession.

**Your current favourite work of art?**

Anish Kapoor 'Iris' – part of his Hayward Gallery exhibition. 'Iris' is an oval shaped vibrant blue pigmented, powdery cavern extending 8ft back into a recess. The colour is so vibrant that it creates an invisible wall between you and its depths and at first you think you are looking at a flat blue oval shape. Gradually your eyes start to take in subtle gradations in colour, curve and perspective. If you move to one side you begin to sense a structure to the curves and beyond it a hole. It attracts like a black hole. I had the sensation of wanting to fall into it. The entire exhibition was superb exploring perceived boundaries and depths created with colour, form and light.

**Your most embarrassing moment?**

Not recognising Chris Smith at a function recently. I saw him at first from the side and thought he was a violinist that I knew. I asked him if he was still playing for the London Philharmonic. Then I heard him introduced to some one else and realised he was secretary of state for culture. He looks so different in real life.

**How would you like to die?**

Laughing.

---

*Claire Russ is an independent choreographer and Artistic Director of the Claire Russ Ensemble. Trained at the Laban Centre, London. Early influences were Graham technique and release work and latterly various European dance theatre practices. She is currently creating a series of duets [B&B]<sup>4</sup> in collaboration with French choreographer Anne Marie Pascoli. Other recent work is for Foreign Bodies Dance Theatre, Anjali Dance Company, and Sir Paul McCartney.*