

“SOUND MOVES”: The process of creative collaboration

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Sound Moves was born out of a shared passion for creating dance and music and a desire to share the experience and knowledge of creative collaboration, gained through 15 years of professional work. Since 1999, young choreographers from The Place (London Contemporary Dance School, London) and composers from The Royal College of Music Junior Department have come together for an annual Sound Moves project. In order to facilitate their creative collaborations, we have stimulated the imagination of over 200 young choreographers, composers, and dancers through painting, sculpture, poetry, and literature.

For the Royal College of Music Junior Department composers, who also perform the music live, the process of collaborating with a choreographer presents new challenges: when music is no longer the sole creative end, but part of a larger unified whole, different working methods and structures need to be discovered, opening up new ways of thinking about music and its relationship with dance. The young dancers and choreographers from The Place are privileged to experience live accompaniment in their weekly classes and workshops. The prospect of having original music written especially for their creative work is an exciting one, which they have wholeheartedly embraced. Creating and developing ideas in tandem with a composer presents interesting new challenges for choreographers and dancers alike. The young artists explore how dance and music combine in spirit through creative collaboration. Music is not treated as an accompaniment to dance “steps,” but, rather, as an equal component of the work as a whole. In order to initiate interactive dialogue and stimulate discussion of what constitutes “best practice” in terms of inspiring young artists and young audiences, the process was documented. Three short original works were performed and also presented on film at the Dance and the Child International/World Dance Alliance Global Summit 2012 by the co-directors of Sound Moves: David Sutton-Anderson, Avril Anderson, and Iris Tomlinson, assisted by Katy Pendlebury, who made the film.

The process

After an initial intensive weekend, the collaborative process took place over a period of three afternoon sessions during which the young artists explored ideas through discussion and improvisation. The chosen theme for this Olympic year was Sports and Diversions, inspired by Erik Satie’s “Sports et Divertissements” (1914), with drawings by Charles Martin. It brings together three different art forms:

1. Drawing
2. Calligraphy (Satie’s own handwritten manuscript)
3. Sound

It is both visual and auditory, which is what this collaboration is all about. Student composers were not to use Satie's music as a starting point, but to write original scores in their own style. In the introductory session, we discussed the theme and explored common ground (e.g. dynamics, texture, phrasing, and line) before working together on rhythmic exercises, which challenged both dancers and musicians. By way of breaking the ice and encouraging the participants to work together and have some fun, David led a call and response, an exercise in spontaneity, improvisation, and rhythmic co-ordination. We then learned the Seguirilla, the traditional 12 beats of Flamenco, subdivided in an irregular way (2+2+3+3+2) so that all participants simultaneously experienced making music and dancing. This was built upon and elaborated throughout the project.

During the initial stage of the process, choreographers and composers formulated their ideas through discussion. From this emerged pieces based on flowing water/swimming, the martial art of Wing Chun, and an athlete's mental preparation in the seconds before a race. These ideas provided the central focus from which a structure could be formulated, as a result of which it was then possible to develop and elaborate choreographic and musical ideas. There was constant collaboration between composer, choreographer, and dancers throughout the second stage of creation. Although the project is not a taught course as such, mentoring and guidance were provided at all times. The final stage involved preparation and rehearsal for two public performances at The Place and the Amaryllis Fleming Concert Hall at the Royal College of Music. Both of these performances were followed by a discussion between the participants and the audience, which provided a springboard from which to reflect on the value of such a collaboration.

Keywords: exploration, creativity, collaboration, music, dance

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Iris Tomlinson is an independent dance artist. As artistic leader of the young dancers' programme at The Place, she nurtured and inspired young dancers, many of whom have gone on to pursue careers in dance as performers, teachers, choreographers, and rehearsal directors. Iris is internationally recognised for her imaginative approach to the teaching of dance technique, composition, and methodology. She has created over 40 original works with and for young dancers, many of them in collaboration with her Sound Moves co-directors. She has been teaching with the artistic team of Chance to Dance, for Royal Opera Covent Garden, since 1999.

David Sutton-Anderson works extensively in dance as a composer, musical director, teacher, and pianist with the Hilde Holger Dance Group (1980-2002); for Northern Ballet Theatre and Birmingham Royal Ballet Education Departments; Amici Dance Company; and Young Place at The Place (1988-97). David has directed/taught courses for accompanying contemporary dance class (London and Caracas). Currently resident dance rehearsal pianist for the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, he regularly plays class for dance companies, including Mark Morris and Michael Clark. David is head of Composition at the Royal College of Music Junior Department and Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame.

Avril Anderson is a composer, lecturer, and animateur, directing workshops for Unicorn Childrens' Theatre, education projects for London Festival Orchestra, Colourscape Festival and

Lambeth schools, and as composer-in-education for the Performing Right Society. Before teaching composition at the Royal College of Music Junior Department, Avril was composer-in-residence for the Young Place. She has worked with David Sutton-Anderson on collaborative projects at the Royal Ballet Senior School and Sound Moves at The Place. She is co-founder and director of Sounds Positive contemporary music group, for which she has recently curated a series focusing on Raqs Sharqi.

Katy Pendlebury is a filmmaker, dancer, and dance teacher. Graduating from London Contemporary Dance School in 2004, she won a Deutsche Bank Pyramid Award to make a dance film with children growing up in central London. An excerpt of this film project, *elyas*, won the Emerging Filmmaker's Production Award at the Dance On Screen Festival at the Place. Katy's films have screened at festivals worldwide, including Videodanza Buenos Aires, LiveScreen (Sadler's Wells London), ReelDance Sydney, Cinedans Amsterdam, ACT Bilbao, and dancin' oxford. Collaborating with composers on her film projects, Katy has commissioned original scores for the films she has made.

All citations of this paper from this source should include the following information:

In S.W. Stinson, C. Svendler Nielsen & S-Y. Liu (Eds.), *Dance, young people and change: Proceedings of the daCi and WDA Global Dance Summit*. Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan, July 14th – 20th 2012. <http://www.ausdance.org/> [Accessed on xx date]
ISBN 978-1-875255-19-1