

Lounge Room Dancing

Rewind to a mixed tape. That syrupy love letter in song from a teenage sweetheart. Or a compilation by your older sibling - an education in cool. What about that earnest mixed offering from an old friend, once new?

Have you still got those tapes? Are they dusty or in high rotation? You're sentimental about the song list, at least. But you haven't been given a mixed tape for a while.

With a Bullet: The Album Project takes you back with a compilation by various artists, made especially for you. Eight choreographers have confessed to the soundtracks of their first, juvenile dance 'routines' and resuscitated those old songs as new "dance singles". The result is a hit parade of short works to an eclectic mix of 80s pop, meditation music, Vangelis, The Who, Elmer Bernstein and Leif Garrett.

Like the cherished mixed tapes of your past, *The Album Project* has been put together with love and a keen interest in you, the audience. Like record selling Rob in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* these dance makers – Shannon Bott, Natalie Cursio, Simon Ellis, Gerard Van Dyck, Phillip Gleeson, Michelle Heaven, Luke Hockley and Jo Lloyd –introduce themselves with a personalised track listing.

The Album Project takes you back to the very beginning. Back to joyful moments of lounge room dancing. Back to nearly forgotten hits that give your age away. Back to being the fond and forgiving audience of their youth. Without being cocky, they know you'll like *The Album Project*.

You'll like the music. "You don't hear this sort of stuff in contemporary dance that often," says Jo Lloyd. At age eight, her pick was *Owner of a Lonely Heart*, a 1983 hit for Yes. "It's just exciting that it's going to get aired again." Lloyd approached her work for *The Album Project* "as a tribute to the '80s, the movement we were into and the dynamics of that sound."

"My sister and I used to make up lots of dances for the family. We were quite committed to it. When Mum was off at work and Dad was watching the footy on weekends we'd clear the lounge room and make some moves."

Natalie Cursio made up a dance with her best friend around the age at which Lloyd was rearranging the furniture. Similarly, she plugged into the sensibility of the music she'd used back then. "When I first started to remember it didn't really connect with me at all. I thought, "This is taking it right to the limit." But after a few listens she let the music suggest the movement.

By contrast, Luke Hockley didn't listen to his track until very late in the rehearsal process. He was concerned that the anthemic Vangelis composition for *Chariots of Fire* (1981) could be "really easy to take the piss out of".

At eight, when Hockley made a duet with a friend, he chose the film soundtrack because he "loved watching that guy run on the beach in slow motion. I wasn't interested in him winning the race."

For *The Album Project* Hockley worked with a group of performers in a process that promoted working and thinking together. "I was really interested in it not being a competition," he explains. It's not about achieving "the highest leg, but about bringing out the strength in other people".

Revisiting the past also confirmed Hockley's love of process. "It was about creating with a friend. We were in the front yard with the record player out the window, playing it over and over again, running around and doing whatever we did. But it was about the making."

The joyful immediacy of this kind of dance making is another reason to like *The Album Project*. Natalie Cursio conceived the project as an opportunity to go back to basics, "the dance and the song... stuff that works. When you're eight and you're making up a dance to you don't think, 'I'm being an artist.' You just think, 'I'm dancing.'"

Even though Gerard Van Dyck first used Elmer Bernstein's title theme from *Ghostbusters* (1984) in a choreographic competition, he describes himself as being "just a boy doing some dance steps. I wasn't intending to make a piece of art."

Michelle Heaven agrees. "There didn't really need to be a reason for me to dance then", when she made her first dance work at fifteen for the students and nuns of her Catholic school. "It was about the passion that I had for dance and getting that out to the music. It was about how you did it. And then, if you forgot a step, you'd failed in my opinion."

Mildly rebellious in black tights and a hippie scarf, Heaven danced to *Baba O'Reilly* by The Who. "I got quite overwhelmed about three quarters of the way through and just completely forgot what I should be doing. I lost one step and then it was gone. It was like paddling upstream for moments." That feeling of blank panic was the starting point for Heaven's new work.

Likewise, Phillip Gleeson re-visited the emotional space of his first dance work. "I tried to use the same enthusiasm that I had then," he explains. Back then the work was a "deadly serious" psychotropic exploration with a stick to meditation music at college in Lismore, New South Wales. For *The Album Project* Gleeson directed performer Jacob Lehrer in an exploration of immersion in a state of being. This time, however, Gleeson is acutely aware of the experience of audience members and their discomfort at witnessing that state.

At the performance of Simon Ellis's first choreographic work, it was the state of the audience that was notable. "Everyone was drunk. It was exactly like a coliseum." It was the first year dance concert of the Otago School of Physical Education in New Zealand. Ellis and his friend Andy, in drag, "came out sweeping and started doing some break dancing" to Cyndi Lauper's *Girls Just Want to Have Fun* (1983). "It was tragic. But, of course, everyone loved it because we were busting all these moves."

Busting the moves is far from the approach that Ellis takes these days, but he was glad for the challenge presented by the '80s pop hit foisted on him in retrospect by Andy. "It was so utterly different from the kind of things that were engaging me," says Ellis. "I thought it was likely that it was going to put me in a place that I was not so familiar with recently."

That place, of the familiar but forgotten, is the destination of *The Album Project*. It's not simply a nostalgic trip, however; the project has prompted a complex interaction between the present and the past.

Van Dyck explains that, because of the project, he now has "a more vivid memory" of what the work he performed when he was thirteen. "I feel like I'm still learning about my own history all the time."

Shannon Bott used *The Album Project* to deal with an aspect of her more recent choreographic history. After making a full length work two years ago that threw her, "into a space of confusion" about the aims and processes of her choreographic practice, she has made a series of short works focused on specific investigations to help, "rebuild and regain creatively." The limitations set by brief of *The Album Project* were useful to Bott. "I really wanted to be particular about it and not do too much."

"There's so much more being considered than the instinct of an eight year old in a school class room," explains Bott. "When you're young you're not really considering the sorts of things you're considering now. As I got older, that creative critic has got louder. So *Album* has been refreshing."

- Elizabeth Boyce

To find out more about *With a Bullet: The Album Project* and how the works were made, visit www.natcursio.com for interviews with the curator, choreographers and performers.