

Luke Hockley, August 2005

I was invited by Natalie Cursio to make a new short work based on the first piece of music I'd ever choreographed to. I really didn't have many expectations in taking that on; I just accepted the task.

The first bit of music was *Chariots of Fire*, which Penny Bold and I made a duet to when I was eight. So there was a really clear place and time and moment.

The clearest memory of that was that bit of music that we were obviously really into. I just thought generally about it. I didn't think too hard, to be honest. I didn't go, "What was I thinking?" or try to make that up. But now, having done *Album*, I can actually tell you more about it. I've actually thought a lot about it now I've made the next stage and now I can see the relation.

I try and let the subconscious do a lot of work. I try and trust it a lot. I did a lot of work but not very conscious I-must-do-these-steps, just a lot of subconscious questioning. Putting it in there. I made sure I had the record, looked at the cover. Just little things that laid the foundation.

I would have danced to *Chariots of Fire* because I loved watching that guy run on the beach in slow motion. As a gymnast and then as a dancer, the most pleasure I have ever felt is that moment of running with absolute freedom and speed. There's this acceleration point and I just love that feeling. I suppose that becomes a link to me as a young person, looking at it and engaging in that physicality.

I wasn't interested in the runner winning that race, although at the time that may be what I felt it was about. But for me the memory is about the movement. I haven't watched the film again since.

The second thing that seems to make sense to me is that 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 and running around and doing whatever we did. But it was about the making.

I enjoy process so much more than performance always. Hilary Crampton said it to me once: "The best work I've ever seen is in the studio". I thought, "Yeah. I always have the 'ah-ha' moments in the studio." If only it could be like that every time. You lay the foundations for it in rehearsal and then maybe that will happen in performance. That's the theory, anyway.

Natalie Cursio said, "Do you want a solo or a duet or how many people?" I tend to like being given the parameters. Because Natalie's running the whole thing, [I said] "If five works, give me five. If one works, give me one." So I got five.

If I'd conceptualised the whole thing myself I would probably have a very good feel for how many people. I might have indicated a bigger group. Natalie wanted a big piece and [I thought] I would be able to handle that. Other times, I'm very particular.

We had six or eight rehearsals, about three hours long. The first one I really came to without any preparation. I'd thought a lot about working with a group of five people and I'd written notes about working in groups. That's what seemed to be there as a foundation.

After that first rehearsal we explored lots of things. Out of that it just became really clear what it was all about and what the intent was and what I wanted to work on.

For me it feels like a real maturation of the work I've been looking at [since] I graduated in 1996. From there to this piece makes a lot sense now for me, whereas there were lots of bits in the middle where I thought, "Am I this sort of choreographer or am I that sort?" Now it seems to be making sense what my strength is and this process has been one of the best processes I've ever done, as short as it was.

I came in thinking, "I want to get out of the way of the choreography". The best stuff I've ever made is where I really use the dancers and really allow the dancers to own the idea and direct their energy rather than imposing.

I have this wonderful tension between improvisation and choreography. I love and hate both of them in equal parts and at different times. I personally can't look at what I do and say that it is choreography or that it is improvisation and yet other people find that very simple. They'd say, "Well that's an improvised score." It doesn't seem that clear to me. I think that's just language. But I'm finally settling a little bit on how I'm working.

I never listened to the music before we started this rehearsal process. I didn't listen to it when we went into it. The first time I put it into it was about rehearsal four or five, very late in the rehearsals. The dancers were all chomping at the bit to hear it. I knew what type of music it is. I knew how strong as a piece it is and how over the top. It's really easy to take the piss out of.

The music exists and it's there as part of the task. It becomes the reference point to who I was as an eight year old. And now the practice is the practice I have now. I'm just interested in those two things meeting. Everyone who's seeing the show knows where that music comes from, they know why I've chosen it. The whole show is framed by that.

I watched it today and I thought, "I quite like that this music's humorous but they're not trying to be humorous. They're not trying to be really serious but natural. All the words I've given them are like 'pedestrian', 'ease of movement'. It's very based on alignment.

All the questions we dealt with were about posture and just being. The idea of standing and letting the fronts of your ankles relax and your body just fall backwards. But really doing that. Not holding on with you toes, not gripping your legs. Just doing a simple fall and then some one catching you and laying you on the ground.

We spent a lot of time just exploring very simple concepts. The work moves from one end of the room to the other just passing through these concepts. They all sort of morph into the next concept. It's sort of little scores for them to move through.

You're watching a group of people really, really know what they're doing but you don't necessarily know. You know that they've shifted, now they've moved onto something else. They're very intent and you can see the focus and the knowledge. I can't tell if people get what the tasks are but that's not important.

What's important is that you're not watching people perform for you. They're not trying to overdo any big movement. They're just trying to work with this idea of the group mind.

The question is, "What if a decision could be made, not just in your head, but as part of a group?" We've all been there, where everyone at the same time, sitting in a group, goes to stand up. Or when two people both say the same word. Was that just coincidence, or did we all know?

It starts with the dancers all in a line. They've got to all step at the same time, which is a classic drama game about getting everyone to bond. But I said, "What if you just weren't allow to start until you get that moment?" If you start walking and not everyone else does, you say, "again". Everyone goes back and you start again. The idea is that you just stay in that place until you all walk as one. When they do it's just like you hit this sweet spot. It's such an amazing reward. The first time we did it I think it took us an hour.

For the purposes of a three minute piece, we've had to set some different rules in place. If, when someone says "again", you don't go back then the whole game starts and the whole piece starts moving. They either all walk at once or someone just decides to start and ignore the group. That's a safety valve. If I were making a full length work [I'd say], "Stay there until you get it".

People start saying things like, "I've noticed I always try to lead. I always want to be the one setting it off." And other people say, "No, I want to be the one following someone else." Trying to get to a place where you're neither leader nor follower sort of zones you right down to a micro place about what your behaviours are. With this really simple physical task, there's nowhere to hide.

It's like a group of people really quickly unthread the complexity of their relationships without having to talk about, "You always do this to me" and "You always...". They just start talking about, "Hang on. Yeah, that was me. I went early" Then they go again. They won't even say anything they'll all just look at each other and know that they were all pushing too hard. You watch this really complex interaction go on and then this group of people just sort of settle. I find that fascinating as a concept.

I think that was my experience of having danced in companies and having worked with dancers and watched over a three year period. All of us become so close and knew each other so well physically that when a new work was introduced we had to learn off video in two weeks, which seems like a ridiculous task, we just did it in three days. Just because we knew the choreographer, we knew the work, we all knew each other. Of course, there's a lot to do then, once you know the material. But we learnt that material really quickly because the discussions were so expedited. We didn't have to go back to base one all the time and explain who we were.

Can I put a group of five people, who don't know each other, in a room and how quickly can we move into that place? I think it's quite rapid. Even just watching the hour we had today and watching this disparate group who hadn't worked in this way for two months come back and settle into it - "Oh, yeah. I remember." The body's just sort of doing it.

There's the group mind concept, which is making decisions, and then there's another thing. Socrates' principle, Maieutics. The concept is this principle of applying pressure to someone. I would apply pressure to you with questions about your life and who you are. Just enough pressure to bring out the strength in you. Rather than me trying to annihilate you or me trying to win or me trying to build your personality up, I'm actually trying to apply just enough pressure for you to find your strength. That idea then can be taken physically.

It's referred to by a theatre director called Augusto Boal. He has *The Theatre of the Oppressed* and a book called *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. He does amazing theatre. He takes quite complex situations in society... conflict between two parts of a society, like somewhere in a village square where the rich and the poor are having a big conflict about ownership of a certain well. He'll put actors in amongst the people, without the people knowing. And, on a Sunday at the square, set up two actors who'll go at each other from these two positions. The people start to engage and join in with this *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

It's basically about creating voices and a platform. He might put two actors on a train - a kid who's got a graffiti can and a guy in a suit - and have them play these roles and then they orchestrate the other people in the carriage to engage. They try and create a context for people to try and have a theatre, a forum.

Part of this work is an idea from one of the *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. You just stand in front of a person, hands on their hands, and you both try and push each other and you try not to win. You just try and bring out the strength in the other person. If they get weak you have to back off and if they are pushing too hard you have to push back.

I just really was interested in that idea with dancers, of it not being a competition, of it not being about getting the highest leg, of it not being about winning, but about, "How can I bring out the strength in the other people in this group in all ways: physically, psychologically, emotionally?"

Those two principles, the group mind and bringing out the strength in other people are very personally important to me as a choreographer, as a person, as a director. Because I am a very strong personality and that can overpower so I've had to find ways to really get that into check and try to use it to bring out other people's strength.

Those principles seem much bigger than this work to me. In this work I've had an opportunity to sort of touch them. But now I feel really ready to take that as a foundation for something quite exciting.