

## Phillip Gleeson, August 2005

Because the brief for *Album* was about what you initially made, it was pretty broad. I'm sure everyone was caught between "Are you trying to re-enact that" or "Are you trying to get into that same space?" I think some people have recreated what they did back then. But I tried to use the same enthusiasm that I had then.

I really couldn't do what I did back then. I'd had this really strong mushroom trip. And found a stick. And I had to make something for college. So I did this dance with a stick. This was twenty years ago in Lismore in northern New South Wales, so it was very much hippie culture and they were all the influences around me then. It's the same with the music. It was meditation music.

I was deadly serious about this exploration with a stick. It was all trying to emulate form, really.

So, what do I need to deal with when I go back? I could try to re-enact it because in retrospect it would be quite funny. But it wasn't enough for me to hook on to.

There's a bridge there somehow. It's made me remember that moment and that time. And the music's kind of evocative of that time, although that's having less and less influence on this.

This piece is about the sublime but it's the uncomfortable side of that for people who are watching. If you get yourself to that point, there's no where to fall down to. You can kind of build yourself up but there's nothing. It's really that edge between being absolutely absurd and sublime. You really don't know where it's sitting.

You're looking at some one who's having an experience, and you're thinking, "This is too much." But they're actually having a moment. It's that weird dynamic. Are they having a moment or are they just being consumed?

Just go there and see what happens. It's kind of beautiful, in a way. But it depends where the performer, Jacob Lehrer, goes with it because it can be quite angry.

I don't really make a lot of work. I've made a couple of pieces but I sort of have to take my time to get into them and try and see what I've got to work with and go from there. Jacob's been really good in surrendering to that.

It would be quite interesting to go with a group of people who you trusted and so that they can trust you. Where would it go?

I've come through that contemporary dance background. Years of contemporary dance really, which is all form and shape and not too much content. There was always that physical challenge in it. That's a great outlet.

But I've always had an interest in stuff that's a bit more subversive. That's what I respond to. I respond a lot more to emotive content.

It's not that I need to have a story handed to me but I like to have something presented to me. It doesn't matter what level that's on. Dance is abstract enough as it is. You take away something out of the language that lives in your unconscious a bit more. What it is. What it speaks. I like for there to be some kind of emotional journey. It doesn't have to be programme notes or anything like that.

It's less about the physical challenge now. As I've gotten into making stuff more, that's what I realise I'm interested in. I almost shy away from dance. What's relying on form and technique and what's actually just coming out that's raw but kind of feeds off that? How do you actually break that down so you get away from pointed feet and that self-consciousness of dance?

I'm interested in darker stuff and borderline humour, black humour, in the work. I like that edge you can sit on where you're compelled to laugh at something but you don't know what you're laughing at.

It's more about psychosis and delving into that unconscious area for material. It's open slather. What *is* that? But then you are starting to define how you want to present that and how you actually get that out. You need some theme because you can't just do work about the unconscious because where do you start? You can't really pin it down.

I'm not trying to make a statement about anything. There's no moral judgement. Hopefully, you try to get beyond that. It is what it is.

I work a lot with Ben Rogan. He came from an acting background into dance. Dancers are a lot more measured because they know they've got to get through a whole day. His response, if you do an improvisation, is a hundred percent. You're just blown away by his capacity to go there and put himself in there and give a hundred percent. No matter where he's at, even if it's less energy or more energy, it's always kind of real.

Then I've worked with my partner, Trudy Radburn. She's more from a dance background but she breaks that down a lot. So mixing those two worlds together was kind of really interesting.

I'm practicing in a particular way but I don't have a set process. It's kind of going in and feeling it out on the day, trying to be relatively spontaneous as to what's coming up. But I have a strong vision about what I want to try and achieve.

This work is very much about performer Jacob Lehrer too. I don't really want to put too much on his body because I'm not really interested in that either. People's bodies do enough anyway, so it's like trying to extract that. I very much work that way. It's more directing than choreographing, except you're kind of piecing it. Sometimes some things are more set than other things.

But this piece, it's Jacob getting into a zone and finding signposts in there. We've looked at things that effectively speak what we've tried to do. He really has to psychically get in there and possess this person.

And that's kind of exciting. It can go either way. It's quite tense but kind of exhilarating. You can either get there or not.

Sessions can work and sessions can sort of not work. So if it's not working you can sort of change tack. You can push through and make it work. Or you can just walk away from it and come back tomorrow. Then, sometimes when it's really working, you can come back and try and repeat that process to get there and you just might not hit there. It's so slippery.

The performer getting into that space where they can grab hold of what you're trying to create is what I'm interested in.

When I made a longer work we really sat and looked at it a lot because we really wanted the audience to get it. In a short space time you don't have that luxury of being able to reflect as much.

I want the audience to get it. I've don't want to just walk in and say, "Well, I'm going to do this" and hope; ask them to clear their minds and come into it. That's my job to do that. You need to really look at that and say, "What does the audience see from this?"

That's a fine line because that means censorship for yourself. You're also not trying to censor yourself to create.

When I think about an arts practice in some ways it's like you're almost trying to tell the same story somehow. When you're working with companies you might be bound by what the company is and it's kind of like a muffled version. It is autobiographical in a way.

If you looked at this [current] piece and that [first] piece it's kind of similar in way. It's not exactly the same piece of music because I couldn't find it. But it's the same composer and the same feel. There's definitely some kind of physic connection for me in this because I've kind of had to consider that and go

back there. If I think, are there markers along the way that I can kind of refer back to? Yeah, there has to be. You're kind of always referring back or refining certain ideas.

You go to do a project and you might have ten different ideas that you want to compress in there. They end up coming in somewhere to influence. I think they definitely do. I wonder if it's possible for people to completely shift. "I practice this way and then I practice this way." I don't know if that happens. I think it is progressive and you can't really escape all that.

If I go back to when I was dancing more I was really governed a lot more by form and that was definitely a harder place to work from than just kind of letting it go.

It doesn't matter what it is that I'm working with, I'm trying to squeeze this story out somehow. I've been formulating ideas about this for quite a while and I do want to make a major work. It was like picking out one of the ingredients from that major work.

What's happened now is that I've kind of extruded myself out of there. That was originally a solo that I did and now I'm kind of sitting on the outside working on Jacob. That kind of represents where I'm at now because I don't want to sit inside them any more. It's too hard.

You get so used to what your body does as a tool, for me sitting back and looking at myself on video or whatever... I can't bear it any more. It's so much more interesting watching other people for me.

I get a lot of pleasure out of my own works. It's not narcissistic. I'm quite glad about that. It makes me laugh. And I feel quite whole. If you're creating and being in it you're so self-conscious. I guess you can read what's going on and feel it but there's a sort of joy in sitting out of it and watching other people do it. It's exciting.

This work hasn't been overly complicated because time has really made you have to make decisions.

I think time's really good to break it up. We worked in the initial stage of the project. We lost a couple of rehearsals and we've had just a quick revisit and that's it.

I like having time away from it. That's when it shifts for you, I think, and you can actually get outside it. You can kind of freshen your ideas about it. Even when you're making it, it's so hard to be objective about it. How do you make yourself objective? You've got so many opinions on the work. But with time and especially if you relax about it, it's kind of interesting to see where the synchronicity of where your thought process is at with what you've already made. Then you've actually got something solid for that to land on. You say, "Oh, yeah. That really works."

Your ideas can develop if you spend that time. I'd hate to spend just a couple of weeks making something, even though that happens. It's a lot of pressure. The pressure of doing something like that is certainly not enjoyable.

If I get the concept and the project then I want to put that out complete so I have real trouble with showings. I wanted to put this work in a big cardboard box, with lights. I like the illusion of theatre. That's a big influence too. So, you can switch off and get rid of the external environment. That darkness, working from there I really like.