

Emancipation of Expressionism

GCSE Dance (8236)

Video transcript for interview with choreographer Kenrick H2O Sandy

<Kenrick H2O Sandy, choreographer and performer>

What was the initial stimulus for the choreography?

The initial stimulus was definitely the music. At that time I was listening to a lot of different tracks, listening to various different composers, and the first one that I listened to was the *Til Enda* track. The last track that definitely was the first bit that was made.... I played with that piece for a couple of years and I wanted to extend it and make it, give it, much more of a beginning, so I'd used that *Til Enda* piece as the end but I was trying to figure out how would I create something that is much, much longer and something that would take the audience on a journey. So, for me the stimulus for this piece is definitely the music. At the same time I wanted it to be expressive, so hence the name 'Emancipation of Expressionism'. My stimulus was also the freedom of expressing yourself, the freedom of having a voice through your movement.

What is the work about?

When you're a baby the first thing you do is start to cry and it's not because you are upset or unhappy it's actually because you are expressing yourself, it's the first time you have come into the world. So, for me, you know, looking at the piece I wanted to show expressionism at different moments, whether it be at the beginning, the middle or the end of life.

Describe the different sections of the work

There are four different sections of the piece. Section one I would say is.... the birth or maybe the genesis. It is the start. It is that moment where the impulse of a feeling or a movement starts to grow and create. So at the very beginning when you see the guys in the spot lights they are all moving like an electrical current is hitting them and that to me is like them back in the womb, the womb of... expressionism.

The next section, section two, for me is about growth and about struggle. It's about... in that piece where you see the people walking past and one guy is expressive into the light. To me that was about everyday life, we tend to want to express ourselves and people just walk by and we're just living our life, but sometimes there is a bit of a struggle and people want to hold you back or stop you from what it is, so there is a level of aggression that comes out within your passion. And that piece was about, you know, how passion can grow and become very, very, very strong to a point where it does look aggressive. But what it is, is that you are just really, really passionate about what you do.

Section three is about flow, it's about relationships it's about connection. The duet at the beginning is about this energy and it flows from one person to another. That's what happens sometimes in a relationship where you express yourselves, you know, you may have an argument where you express yourself, you may have a memory or a moment where you express yourself. It's also about how the relationship can easily manipulate each other... as well as ... gel, merge, play that's that first section.

The last section, which is *Til Enda*, is about empowerment, it's about superpowers, super human powers it's about letting yourself go to the fullest. That is where the true feeling of the emancipation of expressionism is. For me I'm always about empowerment, pushing people, motivating people. I don't believe that all dancers should just do choreography, and just "five, six seven, eight". You also need to have an individualisation within our work and in that piece you see that the core dancers are all showcasing their skills... and to me it is important that they do that because it's growth, it grows them as a dancer. So that last section is about empowerment which then creates the whole piece to have a journey, from the beginning up until the point, the crescendo, that moment where you feel fully empowered.

How did you create and develop your movement material?

From a Boy Blue point of view, we have a vocab. So, we have different types of movement or we have different types of grooves. For me, as a dance company, specifically in hip-hop, street dance, for me it is important to have some kind of legacy, which is our movement, our signature style of moving. So in the piece I now wanted to make sure there was signature movement, but I wanted to make sure I used it in a particular way and using it with the right intention. Also listening to the music, I would listen to the track every single day, break it down, break down all the tracks to the nth degree and I would notate it and write down the counts, write down even if it's a symbol or something, of what kind of sound it was. So if it was a bass I would write the counts and I would put a line underneath the count but if it was much more of a higher sound I would put maybe a triangle, so I know what kind of sound I am hitting, in order to make sure that choreographically I create a movement that compliments that sound.

Also in my way of thinking, especially when I am thinking about conceptual movement, theatrical movement, I tend to use the mind-set of maybe a contemporary choreographer or a physical theatre choreographer and think about repetition, think about motifs, think about signature things that's going to take the audience on a journey through movement. It's like a song, you know, you have a structure of a song, you may have your introduction and you have your verse and you have your chorus. Usually what happens, if you remember a song, you know the song because of the chorus or because of the hook or because of the melody. So with the piece there is definitely that chorus or that melody and you see that through the piece. There are signature parts where you actually see that movement at the beginning, but then it happens at the end, then it happens in the middle as well.

When making choreography I like to explore how I can manipulate and play with hip-hop, street dance styles. In this piece there is krump there is hip-hop, there's popping, there is breaking, there is waacking, there is animation, there are aspects of locking as well. So it's not just taking it as just straight orthodox tradition, it's also playing with the form and it's also taking attributes of the form. So even with the choreography or especially from a Boy Blue point of view you will see attributes of different styles within the choreographic structure.

How is the theme shown through the work?

With the theme of order and chaos in this piece; in every style you tend to be boxed in a particular way: in hip-hop, if you are a b-boy you are a b-boy, if you are a hip-hop freestyler you are a hip-hop freestyler, if you are a popper you are a popper. For me, I believe that within those boxes that's where you create your chaos. Where those boxes of order are there you create chaos within it. So you play within your parameters. And that also goes with regards to my choreography as well and the choreography that was put into the piece. As much as there is a limitation in some of the choreographic devices or the structure or the movement; within that realm or that parameter I'm going to then create as many variations within that. That's where the chaos comes in so I've got order; I have to only use this particular part of my body and within that part I'm going to create tens,

hundreds if possible, of different variations within that area. Also where in the piece you see the ensemble do this movement, that to me is the order and when the individuals do their stuff, that's the chaos. For me it's important to have these anomalies within the piece so that as you see this thing flowing as a strong ensemble, there has to be this individual that is moving and with this piece it's important for me to show both sides, order and chaos.

In the first section the dancers are in a kind of a cube formation. The inspiration of that was a Rubik's cube and how a dancer, how the thing can move, in a way where that if it moves a dancer reveals themselves. So everyone is running, they're all running, we call it the ninja walk, it's one of our movements that we have. So within in that someone comes up and they are showing themselves, then it moves again, then the next person comes, then it moves again. So that's a moment of where you've got chaos this coming up from order.

Then you've got another one where order is made from chaos. In the second section, one of the dancers is krumping and he's going and before he goes off, there's this link and this connection that we use, which is inspired from a rugby scrum. So everyone comes and they flow in to it, so it feels like this wave of people coming in. They are holding him, so as much as they are allowing him to have the chaos there is an order in which the chaos can happen. It starts off facing stage right and then it moves and faces the front but there is still this order happening.

In the last section just the way the ensemble moves and the individual comes out of the piece, again is this chaos coming out from order. So there's always going to be moments, I think, to be honest in a lot of our work we have that, we have order and chaos and we like to show the two worlds because I think it is important for people to see that not everything is just straight... this.

What decisions did you make and why about the choice of dancers?

For me, I chose the dancers who were able to deliver the vision. Those who were able to, who were assets towards the piece, with regards to their strengths, with regards to their professionalism, with regards to their talent and their technique. There were seventeen dancers in the piece, the original piece was made with nine, it then grew to become eleven and for this piece I made it seventeen just to have a bigger ensemble, but with this piece we did it again afterwards and was able to shrink it down to eleven stroke nine people. So, yeah, most times, when I am creating work, I am thinking about people who are able to deliver the vision.

Describe your choices for the staging

With regards to the staging, with this piece there is no staging, there's no props or anything, it's just the dancers. What I wanted, or what, some of the stuff I was investigating was the formations and exactly where on stage stuff was happening. I tend to use the centre point of the stage quite a lot but with this piece there is a feel that it moves in a particular way. I like to go from centre and then move it out and work within that, and especially in *Til Enda* you will see in that piece how it starts off in a centre shape and then it moves in a particular way.

What I have at home is a notebook, filled with formations. Sometimes if I am on a bus or on a train or have some extra time, I literally just fill it up with formations. I go from like a duet to a trio to four, five, six, seven, eight, nine ten. So I write a lot of formations and then what I do I also look at how I can then do the transitions for different pieces. That kind of way of working, I was inspired by watching a lot of basketball and American football. Where you see the coaches going "I want you to go here and you're going to go here." and I'm like, "You've got all them different set pieces" Even with football, if they're doing a free kick, there are particular set pieces that the team have. So I said "You know what, let me think in advance and have a book". So every now and again I might be, stuck, you know what let me look in this book of formations and then I can just pick and I'll take this and this. Plus, at the same time, looking at how big Sadler's Wells stage was at the time, when we did that piece, I was like, we need to be able to take it and move it somewhere and not have the

audience just sitting there, just watching one particular space but let's create this world and these moments.

Describe your choices for the lighting

I knew at the beginning I wanted spotlights. I knew I wanted the dancers in the spotlights. I had a vision of a dancer coming in and putting something within that light. Funnily enough that beginning is quite symbolic and has certain inspirations from say *The Matrix*... when Neo is plugged in and then they pull him out. It's like basically you break out of that matrix. With regards to particular types of lighting, it's to try and create moments and moods. It's a big stage and you don't want to light the whole stage because then it's just an open space. So the first three sections had their moments. The first one was about the spotlights and about just how we can play with spotlights. The second one was more moods and there's a moment where the guys are in complete blackout then they're in blue, then they just disappear again. It's a moment. I'm trying to create moments with the lighting. The bit with the third section, the *November* track, I was trying to create this world of blue and this tranquility moment, because of the beauty of the music and with regards to the movement that we were doing, I wanted it to just be completely blue and with what the guys were wearing, that also helped create that as well.

How did you decide on the costumes?

With this, it was literally like a pastel blue top and similar stonewashed jeans. Which is very casual if you think about it, but the way that it was lit, it helped it, and it was quite fitted as well... all the clothes were quite fitted. I wanted to show shape and I wanted the arms to have freedom, so I didn't want to have long sleeves. The bottoms were like stretched jeans kind of feel because I didn't want it to be track suit bottoms because I didn't want it to be over urban. You know what I mean, because when you think of hip-hop you think of baggy bottoms. I wanted it to be quite clean. Even with regards to the girl's hair, out of the face, I didn't want it to be all big and curly. It wasn't about the hair, it's about just being very, very clean and very clinical, but still have a casual feel. And plus, when you are working with particular types of material that kind of pastel blue and the stonewashed jeans, it stayed how it was underneath the lighting, if you get what I mean.

How do you want the audience to feel?

I want people to be inspired by our work, I want young dancers to aspire to create work like that or better, you know what I mean? It's important for me that the audience enter our world. They get either spiritually or subconsciously taken into it, pulled into the world and made to feel that when they're then thrown out of this world - what just happened? And I've always been a choreographer that really wants to try and push the art form to a level where the audience appreciate, really appreciate, what it is that we do now and what work is done under the banner of hip-hop, street dance, urban dance.

What particular moments should we look out for in the work?

Really look at those moments where I've placed the punches, like a punch line. There are certain hip-hop moments, where you have a physical punch line in the work, it's about really marinating and observing how it flows as well. Think how it flows from one to another... and also the naturalistic movement that we use, like the scrum, it's from rugby, you know what I mean, it's a sport. How, what natural things did we do and how did it move in order to make the piece feel like it just goes, like it just moves; it just flows.

Could you give some examples of signature movements in the work?

There's about four signature moves that I would say is a Boy Blue movement. One of them is called the ninja walk, one is the ninja glide and then there's the ninja static, and then there's also one called the chariots of fire. So in the piece the ninja walk is the one where you see them doing like this. If they are on the spot and their feet are moving really quick that is the ninja walk. The ninja glide is if you are sliding from side to side, and you're going like that, that's the ninja glide. The ninja static is the arms are moving, but there is nothing happening with the legs. So the ninja walk is the feet going really, really quick, the ninja glide is where they are sliding across and then the ninja static is when it's just on the spot.

Chariots of fire, I don't know why we called it chariots of fire. There's some really funky names but chariots of fire is the one where the arms are crossing, open, up, up, cross, open, up and it was just, I don't know, the motion of it just, again I don't know why we called it chariots of fire. It doesn't really make any sense because it doesn't look like you're on a chariot and there's no fire so, it doesn't make any sense, but we wanted something that had that... that swagger, kind of feel that bounce, that boom, bap, that bounce but at the same time you've got the body, arms moving, tap, tap. It's a bit like a celebration and we use it to a certain extent as a groove or as a movement, so the ninja walk, ninja glide and ninja static are movements because there's no bounce in it there's no groove. Chariots of fire, funnily enough, we've been having arguments amongst ourselves of whether it is a groove or just a movement because there is a bounce in it but the arms are quite static... but those are signature moves that we have.