

Dance salad festival 2011: interviews

by Corinne Rochette

I was lucky this spring to be granted access to the backstage of the Dance Salad Festival (DSF) and to meet dancers after workshops, warm-ups or during the reception after the last show.

After the first workshop I sat in (given by Li Han-Zhong, from Beijing Dance LDTX), I was able to interview Masa Kolar and Zoran Markovic, an improbable duo: she is Croatian, he is Serbian...

Corinne Rochette: When did you start dancing?

Zoran Markovic: I was 7 when I started; I became a professional in 1993.

Masa Kolar: I was 7 too when I started, and became professional in 1991.

CR: Listening to these dates, and looking at where you come from, how did you manage to dance together?

ZM: In 1991, I was 16. I was in Hamburg. The army came knocking on my parents' door to get me. I was lucky I had a scholarship to study dance abroad and was out of the country!

MK: We started to dance together in Germany; after the war, we continued.

CR: Have you already come to DSF?

MK: I came in 2007, Nancy Henderek had invited me.

ZM: I was supposed to come as well, but I couldn't get a visa on time; apparently, there is a criminal with the same name as me...

CR: What brings you back to DSF?

MK: It enables us to meet other artists, exchange ideas, dance moves.

CR: Why did you choose modern dance?

MK: From 92 to 98, I was a ballerina. In 98, I stopped ballet for modern dance as there are less constraints, less rules. You are freer to express yourself.

CR: You have been dancing for 20 years already. Dance is a physical profession. What do you intend to do after that?

MK: I have a dance studio in Zagreb. I also do some choreography. When you get older, you have to think about what you will do when you can no longer dance.

ZM I hope I can keep doing something in relation with dance.

CR: Thank you very much for your time.

After the last show, I met Zoran Markovic again and congratulated him on the choreography, the costumes and the dancing. He told me I should tell Masa. He added that it was probably the last time he would participate as a dancer: he was really tired after 5 days of shows.

I also met members of the Ballet National de Marseille (BNM) after their first warm-up, which I was able to sit in. I was hoping to see their stage rehearsal, where lights and sound are put in place, but Nancy Henderek didn't want anyone to see dancers on stage before the press conference. Too bad for me: I had to work the following days and could not see them on stage before their Saturday night show.

First, I was surprised to see that half of the warm-up took place in English... I understood better during the interview the group gave me; Pierre Thys, their press manager, answered most of the questions that day:

CR: Why do you come to DSF?

PT: Nancy Henderek decides on which company she invites.

CR: And what do you find interesting in coming?

PT: The Company hopes to develop its renown. The last time we came to the United States we didn't have a very positive experience, so we do not really know what to expect this time around.

CR: You didn't attend the workshop led by the Beijing Dance LTDX this morning. Do you plan on taking part to other workshops?

BNM: Yes, of course! We only arrived yesterday, so today we are trying to find our bearings.

CR: I was surprised that the warm-up took place in English...

PT: The Company consists of a lot of different nationalities. Here in Houston, we have 3 Japanese, 2 Italians, 1 German, 1 Polish, 1 Belgian, 1 French... he hesitates...

Angel Martinez Hernandez: "and a Spaniard, don't forget the Spaniard!". Laughs!

CR: What brought you to dance in France?

Nonoka Kato: I came to study dance in France, as there are very few job opportunities in Japan. I studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Danse de Marseille.

CR: What brought you to contemporary dance?

PT: One of the characteristics of Frédéric Flamand's choreographies is that he doesn't see a split between ballet and modern dance, rather an evolution.

That's why at BNM, which shares its premises with the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Danse de Marseille, we dance contemporary or classical ballets with no distinction.

CR: Yes, you can feel this during the warm-up. I saw a difference in the posture compared to the workshop from the Beijing Dance/LTDX.

Kristina Christl: I even resumed practicing pointes lately.

PT: Actually this is sometimes a problem during rehearsals, when girls have to go from a "pointes" class to a contemporary type of work!

CR: Since when do you dance this show?

PT: The show was created in 2007. It lasted 1h20 and comprised 12 scenes. Nancy Henderek asked that we only present 8 scenes, which she then curated so that we will only dance for 30 minutes at DSF.

CR: So you had to rework everything?

Vito Giotta : We have been working on the curated version for the past 2 weeks.

KC: Not all the time of course, we continued working on other shows during this time.

This interview took place on the very first day of DSF, as you will have gathered.

I saw the company again after the last show, at the reception to which they very nicely invited me. The ambiance was of course much more relaxed!

We were sitting around a table, and I managed to chat with 3 different groups, with which I had informal conversations. Of course, I expressed all my admiration for the performance they shared with us. For me, with the first piece *Bonnet*, it was the most beautiful. Everything contributed to it: choreography, mythological theme, set and costumes, and of course the dancers! A great "Grand finale"!

I joined Katarina Christl at her table, and discussed with her the compatibility of having children while being a professional dancer. Indeed, I love dance, but I am also a mother... I cannot help but feel for these women who bring us joy but might miss out on an important part of life because of their Art...

Katharina eased my worries when she explained that out of the 20 dancers (more or less) in the company, 9 were parents, and that she herself had never considered having to choose between dance and a family.

And to finish, I met David Cahier, our only French man (dancing in Marseille, but from Brittany of all places!), together with Vito Giotta, Angel Martinez Hernandez and a few others, from BNM or other companies... We talked about a lot of things, about what they saw in Houston (not

much actually, as they didn't have a car and didn't know where to go!) but also about their show. I told them that ending the show on *Metamorphoses* was great; you leave with a lot of beautiful impressions in your head... They explained why, for them, it was difficult to dance last, as the public is tired. It is always quite stressful to get on stage at the end of such a long show.

I also told them about reactions I heard while leaving the theater, coming from 3 ladies who had probably seen a lot of shows in their lifetimes, considering their silver hair: "Leave it to the French to be so weird!". To which I replied that the inspiration for the piece after all, was Ovid, a roman!

We also talked about their future, but they all replied that they were too young to think about it yet, David having only become a professional in 2010!

I left them after a few dance moves to the rhythm of the jazzy orchestra that Nancy Henderek had secured to close the Festival in style... For BNM, the DSF experience seemed positive and the qualms of the beginning forgotten!

Well, this was truly an extraordinary experience. Of course, if you go to DSF next year, you might not meet the dancers, but the performance in itself is really worth it!