

June Johnson Dance Prize 2013

«Dark Side Of The Moon»: Asphalt Piloten / Anna Anderegg

Taking the dance offensive outdoors

When you're sitting opposite Anna Anderegg, it's sometimes difficult to tell whether she is a mischievous tomboy or an adult who knows exactly what she wants and how to get it. She is both a career woman with a roguish streak and an artist with a nose for business. But where does she get her ability to combine the apparently contradictory into something new?

You were born in Biel, Switzerland, and yet somehow you don't quite fit in with your origins. Do you feel at home in Switzerland?

I've never felt at home anywhere. In Switzerland, we were always the "wacky" family. So I made a home for myself with Asphalt Piloten.

When was the moment you realised that you wanted to be a dancer?

It was 2002, on a Wednesday, in the bus on my way to dance class. I suddenly realised that I was doing umpteen jobs just to pay for my dance lessons, but actually all I wanted to do was dance. After that Wednesday, it all fell into place and one thing just led to another. I quit my jobs on the Friday, chucked in my studies and went to a dance school in France. A year later I moved on to Berlin, where I completed a three-month course in modern stage dance.

Have you sometimes thought it was an advantage that you came to dance later on?

Many people spend their whole lives dancing. I was a late starter, but that meant I had time to absorb the world around me and experience other things. That has greatly enriched my dancing style. The school only accepted me because they saw that it was what I really wanted. Technically I was one of the weakest. And yet I'm one of the few who can make a living from it today.

After your training you immediately launched yourself into your own projects and working for exhibitions and galleries. How did that come about?

Some people are comfortable in the role of the performer. But I wanted to be creative myself and escape from the conventional dance scene, which I found very elitist. For me, dance has always been direct: it's communication without language. I don't think you should need a philosophy degree to understand a work of dance. Dance can move people on lots of different levels. That, for me, is its strength.

How were Asphalt Piloten formed?

I worked a lot with musicians between 2008 and 2009, and created some small-scale pieces of my own. Through that work, we were given a free hand for the La Plage des Six Pompes festival, with a small budget, and that's when I set up Asphalt Piloten.

Two years later we made it into the official programme of the Chalon dans la Rue theatre festival with *Tape Riot*, which opened a lot of doors for us in Europe.

How exactly does the organisational side of things work?

I write the concepts and organise the various stages of implementation. That means, first of all, spending five months at my desk writing. For a long time I needed the practical element first – physical proximity to the material – before I could formulate properly what we had in mind. I found it difficult to bridge the gap between movement and words. Fortunately, we got support from a production site in France called La Paperie. We go there once a year to research, far away from where we do our productions.

What do the other artists contribute to the projects?

Everything! I supply the canvas on which we allow the work to take shape. I have a vision of the tempo, direction and content for the piece, and that marks out the frame which the artists then fill. Translating it into reality is a collaborative process in which each of us plays a role. Dancers, visual artists, camera operators, costume designers, lighting people: everything and everyone comes together and cross-pollinates.

How many of you are there?

It varies from project to project, but it's always somewhere between three and fourteen. Until now my partner Marco Barotti has been the only constant member apart from me. But we very often work with the same artists.

Where does the inspiration for the new pieces come from?

Most of what touches me isn't dance. It's films by Tim Burton or visual artists such as Anish Kapoor and Renate Buser, for instance – multilayered works that are accessible and yet profound. I'm a very visual person generally. Other works and people are a strong influence on me. *Tape Riot*, for instance, is based on the talent of the painter Hervé Thiot. The piece more or less developed around him.

What makes Tape Riot so exceptional?

Pieces like *Tape Riot* are very sensitive and fragile. They only work in the right situation. When the surroundings don't fit, they don't have the desired effect. The intervention comes about spontaneously, with the dancers and also the audience; we integrate them into our newly created spaces. So people going about their daily business unexpectedly find themselves involved in a work of art.

Why are different surroundings so important for your projects?

Our works always deal with the transformation of space. The media may change, but the approach remains the same. Our most recent project, *around the block*, is a video installation that makes use of architecture, film, music and dance. It's very accessible acoustically and visually, which means everyone can participate. So our work sets up a process of exchange. In future we're aiming to go a step further, working with performers on the ground and opening up to local artists.

Do all the different projects mean that things have become more ambitious?

What we do now is less “punk” than it used to be, and we are continuing to change. My ambitions for myself grow so fast I can’t keep up. I’m increasingly aware of the technical effort that lies behind a good performance. And of course we don’t want the audience to suspect any of that. We’ve got more resources now than we had before, but our ambitions are growing to match. Technology is a “beast” that you have to control.

What role has the dance award here in Switzerland played in your development?

Until now, Switzerland has only played a small role. Even after we started performing at major festivals in France we were still encountering resistance in Switzerland. We had to fight long and hard to gain a foothold here. Since we received the prize for *Dark Side of the Moon* we’ve been seen differently and we’ve already noticed changes.

Is that part of the opportunity that the Dance Awards present?

I think the awards are hugely important for the Swiss dance scene. They can set the agenda, bring bold productions to the attention of the Swiss public, and have an impact beyond the country’s borders. Dance needs to find a new and younger audience again.

You’ve enjoyed success with your very free projects, but would you like to have a firmer structure sometimes?

The starting point for me is always a fascination with the space. In the past, I’ve mainly projected that towards public locations. But now I feel the need to do a dance piece that is reproducible yet at the same time builds on our idea of focusing on transformation in space. In winter 2014 we’ll be developing a new piece called *zwischen Raum*, in which the stage area will be constantly changing.

Is that a logical extension of your desire always to produce something new?

I value the transience of our works, but I also hate it. Constant transience gets boring sooner or later. And the project doesn’t always justify the effort that went into it. You can only go so far in refining outdoor productions to perfection. Right now, I feel like exploiting completely new opportunities and going deep in a precisely targeted way.

Do you believe that Asphalt Piloten are bringing art into the everyday?

Absolutely. I think there will be more outdoor art in future. There’s more interest in projects of that type. These days we’re bombarded left, right and centre. Advertising is everywhere; it pursues you into every area of your life. For me, art has to go on the offensive too in order to be noticed. We are living in an age without borders, where everything is accessible. I believe art must confront people directly. We want to tell fairy stories for adults and surprise people in completely unexpected ways.

Interview conducted by Saralisa Volm