

## **Interview by Eleanor Sikorski and BELLYFLOP Magazine in London for Dance Umbrella 2012**

Mette Edvardsen has worked for several years as a dancer and performer across Europe and has been making her own work since 2002. Dance Umbrella will present two pieces, *Black* and *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*, bringing her work to London for the first time.

*Black* is a solo which will be performed in the theatre by Edvardsen herself. *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* is a more intimate affair - a group of performers, having memorized books of their choice, will form an interactive library of living books. Each visitor experiencing a personal 'reading'. BELLYFLOP wanted to know a little bit more...

### **Is it of importance to you whether your pieces are situated in a 'dance' context? Does the label support your work? Does it ever get in the way?**

My pieces are usually situated within a dance context. I guess from a historical point of view I belong in that category, and I don't have a problem with that. I think in the way I work and how I think, my practice is very much influenced by my background and experience in dance and choreography. Maybe more than arguing that 'this is dance', I think of my pieces as choreographic proposals or practice.

When I started to make my own work in 2002, and still today, people often refer to it in relation to visual arts and performance. In the beginning I was a bit uncomfortable with the idea of presenting my work in a museum or a gallery, not because I didn't like that context as such, but more because it implied being 'defined away', as something that is *not* dance. I didn't think that was smart. But actually a bit conservative. I was more interested to open or expand how we think and see dance and choreography. And I wanted to belong. That it would be ok to *do* different. Categorisation is of less importance for me today. Maybe my work is changing, or I am. Maybe I am less attached to these notions. The work is the work, and if for you it is something else than 'dance' I am fine with that. I find that different contexts might enrich my experience and add other ways of accessing the work. And in truth, having worked with other medias, such as books for example, I have learned a lot about my own practice and field. Maybe we cannot speak about these categories in a pure form anyhow – we are influenced by so many other things, which in turn slightly modify these forms.

### **How important is it for you to contextualise or frame your work with written or spoken word?**

Usually I write a small text for evening programmes about what I have been working on, or what I would like to say to the audience before a performance, if I have to say something. Most of the time I think people don't read it before, but maybe they do so after? Or maybe that's an assumption because I do this myself. Anyhow, I do not like to explain my pieces - well, unless we are going into a deeper conversation about the work. I also like to think that you can watch my piece without any guidelines. Maybe this is a typical feature of performance, that it should all 'happen in the moment' kind of thing, and in this sense for me the piece does not necessarily need additional writing.

But I am interested in what traces a performance leaves. And in several of my works there is a physical trace, which can be a text, or drawings, images, small videos. In the case of 'Black' for instance, the 'trace' is given right after the performance as a

text.

**You write of *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* that 'There is nothing final or material to achieve, the practice of learning a book by heart is a continuous process...' As a maker, when you 'complete' a piece do you think of it as a point of arrival?**

In general my pieces are very much written. When performing there are inevitably small things and differences from one show to the next, and maybe occasionally it will actually change something in the writing of the piece, or the structure if you like. But for *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* it is quite a different story. Here we are developing the practice of learning by heart and entering a process about memory (and forgetting). For me it was important to bring the focus on to the engagement of the doing, rather than what has been done. Even if you have learned a whole book by heart, you will still need to practice or else you will forget it again. And for me this is also the beauty of it. More than an achievement it is the continuous doing of something, an engagement with the ongoing.

**Are you affected by people's expectations of your work?**

It is maybe a bit blunt to say no? Of course I wish that people will appreciate my work. But when I work I am so busy with what I am doing that I am not so aware of the expectations of others. Or maybe this is a defense mechanism? I also think of it as a generosity towards others to not be too busy with what they think about my work, to leave room for also not liking it. But it makes me very happy when someone has had a good experience and shares this with me.

**What do you think of London?**

As a city to visit I like London very much. And everybody speaks English! I find people are generally friendly, there are good bookshops, fantastic museums, nice parks and great playgrounds. It is the first time I present my own work in London and I am very excited about that. I am interested to know the performing arts scene more, and coming to show work is a nice way to meet people.

**Do you feel like your work has a home?**

Like from Planet of the Apes - "The question is not so much where we are but when we are". I do like to have a space of my own, a studio to work, but sometimes I end up working in my living room after a day in the studio and my pieces are usually made like this between several spaces. Then there are some spaces or studios where I have worked more often than others and where I feel more at home. Sometimes I imagine or project these spaces, even if I am actually physically in another space, as if these spaces are reference points for me and for how I orient myself in space.