



Open Discussion, Shared Thoughts and Memories, with Lizzy Le Quesne, Charles Balfour and David Gothard

(automated transcript from otter.ai)

SPEAKERS

Lizzy Le Quesne, Charles Balfour, David Gothard

Introduction: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021 over spare guitar chords

Welcome to Independent Dance. This talk is part of our digital library, which houses an extensive collection of material to read, watch and listen to, drawn from ID's programme over the past decades. The library offers multiple perspectives on dance and choreographic practices in relation to other fields such as science, architecture, sociology, and politics. The entire library is free to access at independentdance.co.uk/library.

This is a field recording of variable quality with a live audience at Siobhan Davies Studios.

(2016 audio file begins)

Stephanie Sachsenmaier 00:48

Thank you for staying so long.

David Gothard

Thank you for staying so long.

Stephanie Sachsenmaier

This part is really in a way it's open to everyone. There are three people who would like to start with a small contribution. So I'm going to hand it over first of all to Lizzy Le Quesne.

Lizzy Le Quesne

Yeah, I just proposed to tell a little story, which it could have come up earlier in the day, in fact, the way it worked out. But I was expecting to do it now. But it's interesting coming after the it's the story of Rosemary's teaching, which is why it was scheduled in this teaching section. I didn't work with Rosemary as a dancer, I experienced her teaching. And there was one moment from her teaching just as just a spoken thing that she said that was completely baffling and humiliating and excluding any kind of fun and excruciating at the time. But, but really interesting, really, really interesting. It was really part of my sort of journey as a dancer, make the undeserved watcher dance and help me help me see it in new ways, and it comes from an era of her teaching before this MA Creative Practice it was it was sort of not the early days in in Riverside, and it was not the sort of era where it all came together. I guess in the in the in the creative practice. It was it was a middle period from 90s, mid 90s When I was doing an MA in Laban, and in the old building, she was head choreographer. And it was a time, I think in her career where she was quite frustrated, it was one of those times where she wasn't making as

much. And she was being quite she was she was being very rigorous and sort of digging with her with her vision. But and I think it was some frustration in that as well at the time. So it was quite, it was quite a sort of challenging time to be a student and quite interesting. Well, very interesting. So this is just a story of of a tutorial that I had with her. And I had made my little thing to share with my friends. And yeah, just those dances that we've just seen are very different things I don't know just kind of this resonates with, with those how those merge. So I showed her my little bit of a movement. And she said do it through several times just do through four or five times or 10 times or something. And I was just watching. So I did and looped through this thing. It had a little I can't really remember it but it had went up but it went down and it had a little kind of springy thing in it. And so I looped, I looped through this painstakingly crafted bit. And she said and then she said there's one bit which you do differently from all the other bits and it's interesting. There's one bit in there which in which there's something about her, I don't know what. And we and we loop through and through and through and I was doing it and she was like no, no before that. When I go back. She don't know after that. We were going through and through and through trying to find this elusive moment. And then we discovered what it was and it was the moment after I'd done something. And it was, it was the repeated, incidentally, rolling over getting up weird, twisty thing coming back, it was the moment between when I finished my friends and started again.

Lizzy Le Quesne

Exciting it was. And it was absolutely revelatory. It was the most it was the most revelatory moment of my two year MA. Because it was like, Oh my gosh, my body speaks volumes, more than I know. And and all that stuff that Jonathan Burrows was saying earlier about her taking away the tools that you totally relates to that. And. And, yeah, it was just, it's just revelatory, in terms of how to look at bodies moving, and how, how, without renewing it, you know, I had this kind of stuff in there that was repeated that was reliable and textured. And you know, that's my

Kirsty Alexander

I think it's like beautifully too to get up this morning, or midday or late morning. You know, how in the many conversations I had with Rosemary, and in recent years, she talked much about how she was interested in. It's something that was quite functional in terms of movement, and simply focusing on the doing age, rather than sort of trying to attach anything else to it and how she wanted to strip things down further and further. I think perhaps relate in some way. And there's Charles Balfour, maybe you can tell us a bit how you work with Rosemary.

Charles Balfour

Lighting designer and I've worked with mostly a few times before with Rosemary few times, starting from the mid 90s. And then I did most of most perhaps all of the solos with Elena and then toured around, scored around Europe a lot with with Rosemary, which is fantastic. And she contacted me. I think it was in 2014 about a gig in Berlin. And she said keep it free And also preface this by saying I'm married to Pippa Cobbin, who also danced for Rosemary back in the late 80s. She went along, and she had cancer in back 2003 Which Rosemary has helped us a lot with. So anyway, this is an email conversation that we have after Pippa and Rosemary when he had met a function at Laban. Okay, so my this is my email to her first of all, so: Dear Rosemary, Pippa has just come back from Laban and told me she enjoyed seeing and talking to you, but my heart sunk, because I remembered that you asked me about the possibility but doing Berlin this summer, and I've done nothing. I think I was waiting for more info but I really should have got back to you and hope I haven't caused you any grief. Sorry, if I have. Are you still doing it? Well, I'm sure Pippa filled you in on our busy, happy, despairing at children and delighting children boom bustle highs. Same old same old really just with a few posh gigs, posher gigs thrown in occasionally. We went through a pretty nasty time in 2012. Pippa got cancer again. But I think we've almost got over that now. I've just done three weeks in Hamburg. And although I never went there with you, I kept on expecting to see you and Elena walk around the corner. That's what normally happens in Germany. Let's try and meet for a meal soon, somewhere nice. It'd be really nice to catch up. Fondest love, Charlie. So the very next day, Rosemary wrote back, and it's insignificant, but I like the fact that it's her voice, which I'm sure you've heard quite a lot of today. Nevertheless, so this is Rosemary's reply: Dear Charlie, how lovely to hear and how lovely to see, Pippa. We both admitted that we've never been invited to an event in Laban before. So we stood side by side. We did not address all our pasts. So I never actually said send my love to Charlie. But I just want to say that Berlin in the end could not accommodate the solos, but have taken SCAN and the two new works want film and the other strange piece called The Test Pieces. But in 2016 we have the opportunity to do the solos Hidden Voices and Every Three Seconds in the broader reference state retrospective of the work, so there is time. Elena could not do the dates. And also Berlin wanted SCAN and a new group work. So this was not

the time. So no worries. I was always waiting for Berlin for the Go of it and it never came. In the end, we decided to show some work this year and then see. So the overwhelming retrospect when you think how hard it was to get it all together. I had missed you and I work and Elena too, but life moves on and you have to address this and not force anything. 2012 was not so good for us. I was quite ill, but more later, all better now. I was aware of talking to Pippa, that she'd been unwell and thought maybe she'd had some treatments. But it was all too short to talk really. I'm glad that you filled me in. Pippa looked wonderful and I'm sorry that somehow I moved on to another conversation. Please, please apologise. And so another event and another time. I will work with Elena again this July, as I rework a new piece to galleries that will go to Tanz im August this this summer, alongside SCAN. But this concept will come to London in 2016. And then we will do Hidden Voices, Images Every Three Seconds. So this is when I will need to meet you and find out how we did it. But before then, let's meet up and have a meal and a drink. There was not another time like those times with the solos. It was of its own time, and I have wonderful memories. I don't want to dwell on memories as it is hard. But it's important. And I will go back there again and revisit that time. So lovely to hear and please say to Pippa that I'm sorry I didn't say goodbye. Please say that it was good that you came up and spoke to me. Yes, let's meet soon somewhere nice and have a meal and dream that we were in Paris or Hamburg or Munich or Berlin with my love, and so many thoughts that will work so no apologies as we need to get this work together for 2016, much Love Rosemary.

Charles Balfour

I just think it's a. It's obviously very poignant about working this year, sort of totally sad. But I love Rosemary's connections in her writing and how she flips from one thing to the other, but it's it's very genuine.

David Gothard

If I could just jump on now. She had a really specific relationship with writing, which has actually come from the 80s and the late 70s. And working with great lighting designer called Rory Dennis. And of course it was it was it was there was an aesthetic of white light of Rex definition of lighting, which is you don't have any colours at all. I don't know what happened by the time you both on came together. But this was what's relevant to the whole thing is that you have a person with who is opinionated in the best way. You have a you have to have technicians who can fulfil that. And you have to be in a building that expresses a point of view. Now Riverside had three, am I meant to start now? Riverside had three choreographers just to confuse you. I'm gonna go very quick because I've got to. Riverside has three choreographers in residence which of course made Rosemary very angry. There was Rosemary primarily, then the other waves in London at the time, and you stayed there for the rest of the decade. Were Michael Clark, who took class with Rosemary and loved reading his Yvonne Rainer, and the third one was a great Royal Ballet person called Lynn Seymour. The point being that these were all choreographers who were told they cannot choreograph. They all need it. They were all meant that and the dance world pissed on them. They were all people that were meant to go somewhere else within the dance establishment and learn better. So the fact that Rosemary walked into a situation where she became the focus of Donald's policy was a relationship with other artists in a building where you went just because it was an event at that building where you went. And when you're working there, you probably could be sharing a table with Samuel Beckett or John Latham or whoever it is. And that moved, which is very, very rare and he's impressed the American dance world a lot to was a working thing. That kind of fame wishes people would ask, How do I meet an artist I can work with in another art form. And you just have to be able to just go over there and sit at that table. But given that I was the programmer and the artistic director later, hinting at people what they should do rather than having false marriages. But I'm saying these specific things like white light, right purity, somehow the visual art and and movement, not having separation, which of course is the history of 20th century were going on in this situation, but you moulded it as you did it. Right. I this is not as long as it looks. It is I promise you it's not. But I'll just quickly go through this, I can make my point. And it became part, there is an aristocracy of stars in Rosemary Butcher, and then we dead the day, two of them being here, Kirsty's here, professor in Illinois, Sue, Professor of choreography, but these were amazing performers, who when Rosemary wasn't teaching we're teaching for not for her, but parallel to her. And so given that this, of course, is our mourning time for Rosemary as well as be because all the performances this evening have been wonderful are, I connected with it and today that, as well as Dennis, who was here, this wonderful person called Julyen Hamilton, who was dancing in Berlin tonight, so they are not dancing all over the world, this handful of people in America in Berlin in Amsterdam. He wrote to me the small Rosemary saw the moment where choreography occurs, where the yet unmade move becomes flesh in action, where feeling and thought and passion in body and space take form. Form via which the spectator can thus receive awareness of their own perceptions. This to me is radical art

David Gothard 17:22

The roots of how it can be made and how it can work in public. This is what Rosemary inspired and received from me, she has been one of the few and clear seeds from which have grown 40 years of dance pieces which I made and performed. Personally, I thank her unendingly, as should the dance world. I replied, to which he then wrote, right. And I have been talking to him about we told him the value of the Rauschenberg exhibition at the time for everybody in the city is about performance. And it's parallel to what's going on with RoseMarie, except that London was in danger of not seeing a decade of the New York performance dance scene at its most wonderful. They would only have caught up in London way once the shows became big and vulgar relatively at the Barbican or at Sadler's Wells. So the fact that there is a culture coming out of studios out of lofts, but which in Rosemary's case and the equivalent in New York, where you have to have an audience to survive, like the classes that you took, that you taught, and kind of became part of it. So the joy of it all is that however much pain, there was a shared world and the Americans were being caught up. So next door, you would have Trisha Brown, and you would have Rosemary Butcher dancers in the building, or both in the but equally in the buildings. Julyen writes this: was there at the Trisha Rauschenberg piece at Riverside was their rehearsing in huge space and doing the early pieces of Rosemary, all this you know, but also important is that our actual work in the studio, the making of space between and landing was, was pre contact impro coming to Great Britain. Clear detailed work with counter tension mechanisms between two dancers. This is the base of the work I did with Maedee Dupres who was another member of this group for Landings. When contact improvisation came to London contact, it was improvisation was seen as the new work but in actual fact, Rosemary had been doing basically similar stuff prior to this. I remember taking a workshop with Steve Paxton and telling him what I've been experiencing with Rosemary. The counter tension mechanism were 180 degrees different. And that's physically similar to the weight and pressure sharing nature of the contact improvisation work. This is their link but I feel this is highly understated. And it was Rosemary who worked on this with us. We develop this in the studio, and mass produced this work. It was you who allowed it to be seen in the large space, which often new work can benefit from, as it allows it to live in its own sphere of being and less influenced by the wood shavings on the floor or studios and backrooms where it has been originated. These rooms are romanticised and that's fine. But the power of the work itself benefits from the full surroundings where it can resonate. And I'm not confusing this with the pumping up of low quality by placing it in fancy surroundings. I go back to my own piece, and least you can comment on what he says if you want to. The brilliant Rauschenberg exhibition at the Tate Modern splitting dance, the visual arts and performance clears the mind. Members of Trisha Brown's company in the Rauschenberg set, bring bring back to that role back to London. Work that was seen that that time, the decade of the Judson in New York lofts post Merce Cunningham and was in danger of being missed by the London audience. In a period before or later, big shows by these artists came to Sadler's Wells and the Barbican arguably have less impact. This had to be the policy of dance at Riverside Studios that I programmed at the time into my artistic directorship in the 80s. It had a point of view and it launched.

David Gothard

They launched Rosemary that allowed her opinionation to exist. In other words, people didn't necessarily come because they belong to a cult of Rosemary Butcher. In Robin Howard, the bloody contemporary, which gets forgotten had walked out of the Riverside board after losing out on the building for London Contemporary Dance, stating flatly that in any case, the BBC Doctor Who studio floors of stone made that art form impossible. In 1976, I had used the anti Riverside [unintelligible] legendary The Dead Class poems performance bombshell played by a company of major Krakow artists, who were going to turn performance in Europe inside out. BBC Television covered it and [unintelligible] and Fontaine were queuing in Crisp Road for tickets, and I was asked to programme a place for an official in a year later. For a moment with Kantor or the visual arts and performance had no value. And it had to be seen by the art public, as a precedent was set for success in the avant garde with an audience. I spent the rest of that year under a special licence, preparing weekends of activities relating to the community across the arts not quite knowing what had happened but confident in the European success of the opener I had open house for prospective artists responding to that president. Knowing now the general audience existed for difficult work. One of the six Sex Pistols schools a local band, had a father rewire the building and ask for his son to be allowed to play in an empty room, under my lean. In the middle of this Rosemary, which arrived, this is before the Sex Pistols gives you a day 76. Right, Rosemary turns up. She has successfully done a performance on the quayside, outside at the significant Bristol Arnolfini Gallery and had to show the slides to show me. Above all, they had danced in plimsolls. And you could handle a stone floor. Later, she convinced me that she had a friend returning from a scanning studio within days, and he would perform plimsolls too called Richard Alston, a bit chubby, but it was very good.

The radicalism the radicalism thus continued in performance and with nightly workshop classes developing in what became an official residency for the best part of a decade when I left. Bartering began and she or members of the company would teach and make money that way, a little. Monthly performances would compensate for rent and be paid as it were. There was a glorious role call of Rosemary dancers who taught and bridge here. Above all, they bridge the axis to exits and Dartington where Mary Fulkerson on and Steve Paxton, inventing contact improvisation, major geography of invention flow with a history of experimenter Dartington, they could compete with what the Americans had had, a black mountain college historically. From these places, and at that moment, Rosemary and her team, Maedee, Miranda, Sue MacLennan, Dennis Greenwood, Julyen Hamilton, later Kirsty Gabis Agis and significant interlopers from the ballet world, like Matthew Hawkins and Jonathan Burrows can't imagine how naughty that was. Would spread the word politically, it opened up a dance world that was partisan and stuck to its own definition of dance. Michael Clark took class with Rosemary and read Yvonne Rainer, but that's another chapter. Two or three important points if you were in residence or a member of the public. These large tables made it a meeting.

David Gothard

Ashley page writes about sexual. But seriously, the tables in an exhibition space at a time when this didn't exist anywhere else was a means whereby you met an artist in another art form. I don't know, it's always been difficult, I don't know if it still is a dancer, thinking of his or her first piece of choreographic performance, met or saw the work of a painter. The spontaneity of this was fundamental and Rosemary's first two collaborations with Heinz Deiter Pietsch and Jon Groom set the examples. They were not programmed as such they were not meaning they were not married or put together. They met and it was not a performance design by the border was not the frontier was not there. And fundamental which connects with the lighting issue is that what is visual is not decorative. It does not decorate the performance. It is an element of the performance. And until the arts, every art sorts out its definition of what is visual. Like even the visual arts and I think that theatre is camp. But theatre has no idea what visuality means and dance of course really wants what makes something a bit entertaining and spectacular. Still. They were not programmed as such, but they met and created work in the New York fashion, where composers took their where Rauschenberg was either a painter or a performer. The bridge spontaneously followed that cue. Resident composers took their parts such as Michael Nyman, but it has to be said proudly. That question and answer sessions had to be urgently begin with the monthly dance performances of this group so that they could take over from the box office explaining to punters how it was possible to dance against the rules. Then and just creating that facility for people who are confused and think they're in the wrong room. Norms out of the question answer, but that's often what they focused on Rosemary created this historical explosion. She was respected by all. One key addition remains that this is really, really very important. And it's that the Riverside is late and Chris Harris, who's known by one two people here. And the superb photographer of that generation early Michael Clark photographs of Rosemary's work and how he saw his work is he died sadly with his work has catalogued that the V&A and he began as one of the great dance for choreographers of our time. Not because he was sent into photograph Rosemary's performances, but he sort of lived in the building with Rosemary's performance. And I would come in in the morning after a benevolent nightwatchman had overseen all these people play too much on someone taking too much drugs, probably not in Rosemary Butcher's company. But and there will be a most exquisite photographic testing. So it was kind of human things were going on. And out of this came a kind of relationship that can't be pushed back into being just dance. And I think that's what Rosemary's issue is, I later was teaching in illustration, Royal College of Art, I brought in Rosemary, again, eventually did a performance. And, again, don't choke on the word illustration. Rosemary was invited, because there were people in the class who wanted to know about that kind of thing. And so we could make it happen. So it's kind of the artists creates the rules, not the rules for the artist to fit into in a funny way. But because it was a theatre in exile from this Royal Court, it's called Theatre in Certain Square, there was a production team. And the show did have to begin at 730. So artists, thereby jumped into doing what I call real performance, as well as having the gallery installation, but that was a fairly relaxed thing. Finishing sort of a level just isn't the day right, so many questions.

David Gothard 31:45

That that's what it was. That's how it began a very opinionated, wonderful person hitting against another opinionated, nice person who could do what she wanted to do, actually. But there are a few rules like, you've got to do a public performance and the right for the time, but as it's thought about more and more days like this, and research, it's not so far from what you'll see in the Rauschenberg exhibition, as one thought the gulf between New York and London would be full stop.

Lizzy Le Quesne

Very short, may end. I have a little four line poem from Martin Cole, who I feel some of you know who was taught by Rosemary as a dancer in 1980 it's about fear. It's very very short. And if I don't put it in I'll feel really really guilty. He texted to me today. The manifold variation of the arc of alarm, accumulation, accumulation, accumulation, a heart blown apart, as South Devon sunlight pierces the hallucinating action.

Stephanie Sachsenmaier

I don't know if we I think the idea was also I'm sure everybody's full of ideas, and also memories, still. We can be in the parlour downstairs so maybe, it's just I really want to thank you for sharing bits from you know, and really over four decades, I think we've had insights today of people who who worked with Rosemary in a range of capacities. And it's nice to share this day with people who have been personally touched professionally, related to her. And there will be further events in the future we wanted to create this day, I think to mark, of course, the passing away of a very special person this year and provide space for a first kind of gathering. But yes, it has been a very rich day. And I want to personally say thank you for working with amazing people to make this they happen and for all these wonderful contributions today. Anything you want to say?

Kirsty Alexander 34:27

We want to appeal thanks to everybody who's contributed and their work. I hope you've had a chance to see a lot of things as well as joining the discussions up here and very grateful to all contributors and to all our volunteers who come tirelessly they got to put into the right place at the right time. I haven't given them tea and wine and cake all time, thanks to the cake bakers. And thank you all for coming to [unintelligible].

(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)

This has been a talk from Independent Dance's Digital Library. Find more from the archives at independentdance.co.uk/library