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Should designers be funded as choreographers?

05/01/2015

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What is a choreographer?

Presumably they are the person responsible for the creation of the dance work.

However, what if the design is what actually gives the work its power?

Booming lights, elaborate costume, intricate set and average dance does not make high quality dance theatre. It makes great design, supported by some movement. Then why in this instance should choreographers be funded and celebrated as the artistic visionary, an accolade normally followed by huge future subsidies?

This is not to discredit interdisciplinary work. Design elements integral to the work and sewn into the fabric of the dance are phenomenal and hopefully present an indication of what the future of dance theatre should be: in this case performers would almost certainly never dream of rehearsing in the studio without these essential design elements.

What I am talking about is the epic moment the dancer enters, intriguing audiences and building tension with an intricate and beautiful design feature (say a hat perhaps), for it to then be taken off stage by another dancer almost immediately, from where it does not return until the last five minutes of the work leaving you questioning if it returned because there was a pause in the studio one day and a dancer cried 'oh, we haven't used the hat again?!'. Inviting an audience to actively engage with the work through the design, only to remove the treat quickly and leave them feasting upon some extremely virtuosic yet dramaturgically confused dance is quite unfair and lazy choreography.

Dance work should be able to speak to an audience in a studio with the dancers wearing their everyday rehearsal clothes, using the design to elevate the power of the work when it enters the theatre (if it is designed to enter the theatre at all). However of late, there have been far too many works looming on the larger, dare I say commercial, side of the dance theatre world where without the design the impact of the work would be completely lost.

Of course it would be far more controversial, and potentially interesting, to spend the next paragraph attacking the work of artists who fit into this category but I am unsure if this would serve anyone other than those who enjoy a bit of artistic drama or demeaning those whose subsidies they envy. After all, we have a system which does not challenge these artists so why shouldn't they get away with it; if anything should we not challenge the system?

What is up for question is what potential funders would say to a designer applying for support to

Blog Dog

Depending on what we are up to, our resident blogger could be artistic director EJP, one of our dancers, a collaborator, an audience member or even you?

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make a dance work, using some of the performances where the quality of design has outweighed the quality of the dance as an exemplar? Would audiences flock to see this work the way they do with some of the large, commercially revered names of the present? My guess would be, no. And if this is the case, it is surely unfair to extensively subsidise and flock to see the choreographers using these designers as crutches?

EJP

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