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IM FOKUS

MARC MOREAU

BALLETTKUNST FÜR DIE
NÄCHSTE GENERATION

CHAN HON GOH

From Director to
freelance choreographer

CATHY
MARSTON

KRITIKERUMFRAGE
2019



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Cathy Marston

Transitioning from director to freelance choreographer, could you paint a picture of what that looked like?

I was a freelance choreographer before I was a director, so it was actually returning to something I knew...and yet there has been this moment for six years, where I was primarily based in Bern. I would choreograph one piece a year elsewhere. Nevertheless, it was a big change to go work with and choreograph a new dance each time and initially not knowing if people were going to be interested in bringing me out into the commissioning field again. As it turned out they were and it has been flowing very well ever since. It was a good period at Bern, a very inspiring time where I could develop my choreographic roots to making a piece... my craft or specific methodology if you wish. Now going to work with different dancers brings different influences to that and that's definitely inspiring.

Would you ever consider having your own group?

When I was finishing directing the Bern Ballet I was considering it. Actually, I have a project company called the Cathy Marston project which I set up a year before I got the job in Bern. That company still exists and I did consider reviving it when I was transitioning. To be honest, I have been a bit overwhelmed with commissions that are too exciting to say no to and there has not been a need for that so I can really concentrate on the choreography instead of the fundraising and administration that it takes to run a company.

Cathy Marston Photo by Clare Park



Cathy Marston's 'Snowblind' San Francisco Ballet, photo by Erik Tomasson



English Choreographer Cathy Marston is very busy at the moment, but she finds time to sit with ARMANDO BRASWELL and discuss choreographic process, transition and what she is doing now. A leading woman in the choreographic field, Cathy is a choreographer on demand. How she describes herself? „Cathy is a choreographer, who joins the artistic dots and creates form for stories, emotions and ideas. She gives new perspectives to old narratives; opens original ideas to new audiences and crafts unexpected matches between classical and contemporary art forms. She bases her work on expressive integrity and technical quality, reconciling discord with grace. A natural mediator, Cathy combines artistic vision with practical prowess to achieve her objectives.“



The Grange, Ballet Black 'The Suit' Photo by C. Greenwell

Any exciting upcoming projects you can talk about?

I've been creating a new work for San Francisco Ballet, I can't announce the theme yet but it was very much fun and that will be coming out in March. I'm about to go to Joffrey Ballet in Chicago next week to stage „Jane Eyre“, but I can't announce anything else. And there are a few.

Could you give us a summary of your choreographic process from idea to studio? Are you specifically inspired by anything in particular? Or have a set process?

I'm often inspired by books, literature and plays, dramatic works. Sometimes biography. One of my favourite things to do when I'm traveling is to go into a book shop and do a "real-life-Google" and let my eyes wander around the shelves and one thing leads to another. It's so nice to do that in a real place, rather than staring at a screen. Often it's a combination of linking a specific commission to a specific story. If I'm invited to make a piece in America it's an opportunity for me, not necessarily, but why not, I focus on American literature. It may not always be the case. Part of what I love about choreographing is creating a dialogue with the audience. I want to interrogate what we think we know about certain narratives. And maybe looking at that narrative from a more unusual perspective. So that's the start. When I'm in the studio usually having worked with a composer and a set designer and sometimes a dramaturg, I will then distill all of my research into a list of words that describe each character or set of characters in the piece.

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Cathy rehearsing with Les Grands Ballet Canadiens Photo by Sasha Onyshchenko

'Snowblind' San Francisco Ballet © Erik Tomasson



That is the first week or so with the dancers developing a vocabulary specific to their particular role we make an alphabet like that. And then, when I start to put the scenes together with the dancers, can be much more collaborative as in how the scenes are built because they have a physical knowledge of how that character communicates and exists.

What are you working on right now?

Right now I am creating my first work for the Royal Ballet's main stage which is somewhat of a homecoming because I was associate artist of the Royal Opera house for six years. I came from the Royal Ballet school and came from the company, but never choreographed for the main stage at Covent Garden. That's thrilling and I'm really excited to do that. The piece is going to be inspired by the cellist Jacqueline du Pré which was a child prodigy in the 60s. She got multiple sclerosis when she was young and lost her "voice" if you will. This ballet focuses on her life and her talent.

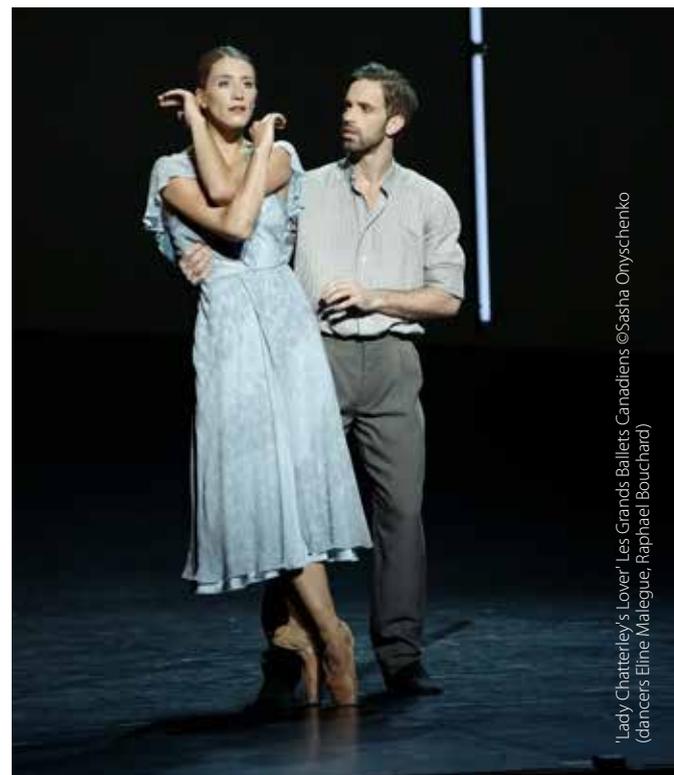
What types of dancers do you like to work with? Can you confess a preference?

In terms of looks not at all because it's very much up to the story. That's of course the first thing that I'm looking at. In terms of dancers qualities, I like people who are open. A creative who wants to engage with me, each other the audience and of course the story. Obviously technical ability is great, but I'm pretty open with regard as to which technique I could be drawn to. I'm being asked to work with ballet companies at the moment and I like pointe work very much. Usually for me there's a mix of on pointe and off pointe in a piece. That's often dictated by the character I'm trying to portray and sometimes the structure. For example I could use pointe work to differentiate between two different periods of time. I love dancers who wear pointe shoes like slippers, an example would be Bridget Breiner. I remember working with her on a piece and she had a very bad infection in her foot and she simply

cut a hole in the side of her pointe shoe and kept dancing. So the pointe shoes were used with a light touch. She is one of those dancers that has the ability to look like they're wearing socks when they're actually wearing point shoes and that's wonderful, I like that very much.

Could you please name female choreographers you think people should check out?

- Crystal Pite my favourite.
- Bridget Breiner (*a wonderful artist in every respect*)
- Annabelle Lopez Ochoa (*a colleague I often cross paths with*)
- Didi Veldman (*I commissioned in Bern*)
- Gemma Bond (*recently worked with at ABT and would love to see her work*)



'Lady Chatterley's Lover' Les Grands Ballets Canadiens ©Sasha Onyschenko (dancers Elaine Malegue, Raphael Boucharde)



- Helen Picket (*heard great things about her „Crucible“*)
- Karole Armitage (*I commissioned in Bern*)
- Andrea Miller (*I commissioned twice in Bern*)
- Pam Tonowitz (*currently also creating at Royal Ballet*)
- Ruth Brill (*I worked with her as an 11 year old and she's just left Birmingham Royal Ballet to concentrate on choreography, and re-staged/re-imagined the work I made on her*)
- Morgan Runcre Temple (*I'm hearing very interesting things*)
- Michelle Dorrance (*watched a great tap-ballet rehearsal of hers at ABT*)
- Stina Quagebeur (*interesting new voice*)
- Jessica Lang (*I don't know her work well but she's often someone I hear about*)
- Kristen McNalley (*a brilliant Royal Ballet dancer and sometimes choreographer*)

What's the last performance you saw?

I saw Alvin Ailey last night! It was my first time! I had never seen the company before. It was my first „Revelations“. It was fun to see the company it was an amazing energy.

Could you name some differences in creating on American companies and European companies?

I made „Jane Eyre“ in the UK and recently had to stage it for American Ballet Theatre in New York and will be also going to Chicago to The Joffrey Ballet. Making it at Northern Ballet, which does a lot of narrative ballets, and it goes without saying that the dancers knew how a 19th century man stands or walks and you can of course question that according to character. One character might work differently than another and we do check that. But for a standard party scene they just go and do it. It was quite funny and interesting in America to see that this information was not part of their kind of culture and background. We spent quite a lot of time working on the walk of Rochester. How do you portray this kind of moody character, but still get a sense of the period and the place. That was really interesting to me. I am going to San Francisco Ballet this summer and I'm working on an American story that is more 20th century and they really got that I didn't have to give instruction to what that was at all. Ballet companies are international anyway. There must be a process of absorbing the kind of popular culture and in Britain, 19th century classic literature IS still a part of popular culture. ■

