



Val Borne



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Presenter Interview プレゼンターインタビュー Founder Val Borne talks about the Dance Umbrella festival

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創設者ヴァル・ボーンが語る
フェスティバル「ダンス・アンブレラ」とは？

Val Borne is the founder and Artistic Director of the Dance Umbrella festival that has been run in London for 27 years. Ms. Borne was in Japan recently to serve as a committee member of the Toyota Choreography Award, representing as one of the world-class presenters of international contemporary dance community. This interview took place during her visit in Tokyo..

(July 8, 2005 in Shibuya, Tokyo. Interviewer: Yoko Shioya, Director of Japan Society, New York)

The Dance Umbrella festival has continued for over a quarter of a century. Could we begin by looking back over its course until now?

When I was a junior officer at the Arts Council England I wrote a proposal to suggest that we should have a festival in London to showcase all British choreographers in small companies. Then I left the Council for working to join the Greater London Arts. Before my arrival, only one officer ran Dance & Drama Section at the Greater London. They decided that there was enough stuff happening to hire one more staff member, and they hired me. One day, the Arts Council England rung me up and said “OK we have agreed on your proposal. What will you do?” So, can we do it? We had five months to make a festival. Such a short notice! (laughs). But that was a part of my job while I had other things to do. Still, I was not alone and we were able to organize the first festival in November 1978.

From the first time, was the festival called Dance Umbrella?

Yes, but we did not invent the name “Dance Umbrella.” It was from New York. There was a festival called “Dance Umbrella” run by TAG (Technical Assistance Group), which was working with Arts Services, a non-profit organization that represented people like Steve Reich, Phillip Glass, and Douglas Dunn, and dance people as well. They worked together to organize a festival to showcase those artists. Somebody saw it in New York and thought that was a good idea, and that was why I took that name. So the name was not my idea.

Our Dance Umbrella was supposed to be one festival. It was a big success, much more successful than anybody had predicted. So we decided to do the second one. And it happened in 1980 because we spent about 15 months to prepare. And the third one happened in autumn of 1981.

The third one, you did independently, not with the Greater London Arts (Council).

After the second one, a Fine Arts officer at Greater London Arts realized that it had cost a lot of money, much more than they expected. Trans-Atlantic phone calls, no e-mails, no fax. Everything was by telephone. It was also expensive in the postage and mailings required. So they sort of kicked us out—and we became independent.

Wasn't that a courageous decision? When even the government funding could not afford the expenses, why did you think you could do it independently?

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When we were discussing with artists in NY, we found the Arts Services that provided a management service and represented several artists. And we also looked into another organization called Pentacle — which still exists in New York — as a different kind of model. We decided to go with the Arts Services model and created a service for British artists based on it. As for the money, Portugal's Gulbenkian Foundation gave us to start that management services enabled us to be independent and financed the festival as well. So, for eight years we provided management services, representing four or five different (dance) companies and artists at any one time, while organizing the festival annually.

Was the Arts Services your main thing for those first eight years, mission-wise?

It was equal, really. The problem was that the management was so successful—or the artists became successful—that this aspect took more and more time, and the companies become bigger, they had more dates and more tours, and it meant more work. Anyway, by 1988, we decided we had done as much as we could with the management business. Some of our companies had become successful enough to have a fulltime manager of their own. With us they would have to share their business. So what we hoped was each one of them would grow to the point that they could function on their own, and that is what happened.

From the late 80s into the 90s you were organizing festivals in places other than London as well. Are you focusing primarily on London again in recent years?

Yes, but we also do touring productions. Since 1995 we have usually done one large-scale tour every year. We usually do these tours with American companies. This year we did with Mark Morris.

Why is this?

I don't know. It is interesting because I am not doing it exclusively. It began with Mark Morris, Steven Petronio, Trisha Brown. Last year it was with Merce Cunningham. I think this year was the 4th tour with Mark. But we also did tours for Belgium's Rosas and Israel's Inbal Pinto and France's Montalvo Hervieu. And now we are just beginning a program of small-scale tours next year. It is financed by a grant we received from some foundation for three years to do two tours every year for small companies. So Dance Umbrella will concentrate on our London festival and these tour programs.

We hear that for 2005 you received a grant from the French government and 10 French companies are coming...

Yes, this is the first case. Back in 1989, which was the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution's Declaration of Human Rights, we did collaboration on French work which we call "Revolutionary Tactics," which we did in conjunction with John Ashford of The Place Theater. He brought like five or six French companies in the spring and we brought five companies to our festival in the autumn. But it wasn't as big as this year's one. This one is called "France Moves," similar to the one that happened in New York four or five years ago. We will organize it as a sort of festival within our annual [Dance Umbrella] festival. There will be 10 companies, with two of the main productions being the Paris Opera Ballet—which will perform *Le Parc* with choreography by Angelin Preljocaj—and the Lyon Opera Ballet performing *Tricodex* with choreography by Philippe Decouflé. But the whole thing of "France Moves" kicks off with the debut of a Franco British collaboration—which brings together a duo of France's Sylvie Guillem and British choreographer Russell Maliphant. In fact Russell has done a choreography work with Sylvie in the past for George Piper Dance Company commonly known as a Ballet Boyz. But Russell has never danced with Sylvie before. This festival will be the first time.

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Could you tell us what do you emphasize as your festival theme?

I think this is going to sound stupid, because it sounds evasive, but it's really "Excellence." And "Diversity." Not nationality at all—that is why this is the first time we've ever done program like this year's French one. Because I haven't really wanted to restrict myself to one country. Even this year, we don't. We have [American] Mark Morris, we have Forsythe [American active in Germany], and we also have [Canadian] Daniel Leveille, as well as eight British companies. So it is not exclusive or anything, but also it is interesting that of all countries. It is probably only France or the U.S. (that you) could do this way because you have enough choice. In fact, there were several companies that I would like to bring from France if we'd gotten the money to do it.

Many of us have a perception of the U.K. as a theater country more than a dance country. And in fact there are countless theater venues but just a few that are specifically for dance.

You are correct. We started out with Shakespeare. We are very much a text, literature culture. But dance is also developing very rapidly in the U.K. For example, at our very first [Dance Umbrella] festival in 1978, we had twelve British companies, and four soloists. Today there are at least 300 companies.

Mission-wise, would you say that your festival is dedicated more to promoting excellence than to promoting the artists of the U.K. specifically?

In addition to promoting excellence, another important aim for us is to represent U.K. artists within the international context. Usually when we choose works from overseas, I look for something better than what we have here in the U.K., or of a completely different sort. So I always look for something which is different and has something special identity or character. I don't do this alone of course I have my colleague, Betsy Gregory. Sometimes we go together to see works, sometimes not. I trust her decisions in the case of things she has seen and I haven't.

You are also starting a new program this year called "Brief Encounter." Is this something to support emerging artists?

There are two things this program is aimed at. There are younger artists, who have not performed at Dance Umbrella before—it's a way of widening the structure to include young artists. But, it's not just that. For example if there are established artists who have not a full evening work but just a 20-minute or a half-an-hour show, then they could do that if they wish. For example we have a choreographer named Rosemary Butcher who is very established, making dance for over 25 years. She had a very small dance piece like 20 to 25 minutes a wonderful solo. We asked her if she wanted to show that [in Brief Encounter], but she eventually chose to do a longer piece. As a result, the first Brief Encounter will present a piece by a new artist.

The idea behind Brief Encounter is—and I don't know if it will work—that we have the Sadler's Wells Theatre, but there is also the Lilian Baylis Studio Theatre, which is in a same building with a different entrance just around the corner, but only 150 seats. If you have a ticket for the Sadler's Wells Theatre, you can also go to see something in the Baylis Theatre, if you are quick for you come to the theatre at 6:30 or because it is going to be just a half-an-hour. And at 7:30, you see the performance at the Sadler. For people with a Sadler ticket the Baylis admission is free. But the Sadler's is a 1,500 seat theater and the Baylis Studio just 150, so not everyone can see both. Admission is on a first-come-first-served basis. Then there

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are people who just want to see the Baylis performance, and for them the admission is five pound—not expensive.

That's interesting. It's like a second card at a boxing match, isn't it?

Yes, like warm up. People who come to Sadler's are quite conservative. They don't want to try something new. We try to seduce them. We offer something we think is really interesting and tempt them to try it. That is the concept behind Brief Encounter. Will it prove to be a successful idea? Well, I don't know. We'll see.

These are short works and admission is free, but do the performing artists receive a proper performance fee?

Oh yes, absolutely. It is treated as a proper show.

Last year you had a total festival audience of 39,000. What was the demography, in terms of age, income, ethnicity, etc.?

It varies with which the venue. For instance, Sadler's Wells has an older and richer audience.

In order to encourage younger people, it's often governed by price of seats. Good seats in Sadler's Wells cost £25, which is expensive in England, though maybe not in Japan. There are also £12 seats in the very back in the 2nd Circle, but they are not very good seats. So we do this thing where we offer standing room tickets for spots very close to the stage for just five pounds. Very good view. All you have to do is to wear comfortable shoes and be prepared to stand. It is very popular. These people are very often new to dance and new to theater, and they come because they thought "OK with £5, I can try it." You can tell that they are first comers to the venues like Sadler's Wells, because every time I walked out from the Metro station everybody is asking where the theater is. So it's been very, very well received for 4 years now, and successful.

How about people who can regularly afford tickets at the Sadler's Wells? Do they go to the more experimental venues like The Place Theatre?

A few of them do. We have been trying this year to arrange a central box so that you could ring just one number and book tickets for four or five different venues. But this is very hard because they each have different ticketing rules. So people still have to ring each venue to get tickets separately.

Another thing I would say about audience trends is that there used to be about 70% women, 30% men. But it is changing now, and I think it is about 60-40 now at Sadler's. And The Place is much near 50-50.

So with 50% of your budget coming from the government, does it mean that your festival is obliged to provide cheaper tickets to attract a younger audience?

No. We are the ones who want to do that. We want to attract the younger generation. There is a danger of having only an older generation audience with money. We want to make sure that the younger generation will come too.

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In other words, when you have a wealthy audience, financially the festival is safe.

But it means that the festival does not have a future audience.

Yes, and it's an interesting thing that if we do performances which are not in the theater space, you get again new people coming. For instance we've done four or five things outside of the theater space, starting with Natural History Museum which we used for an American choreographer. We have also used the British Library floor for a site-specific work that was very successful. We used the Crystal Palace in the National Sports Center, and we used the Tate Modern for Merce Cunningham. This year we will do one at Tate Modern again in much smaller scale for the Rosemary Butcher work I mentioned earlier.

So these new venues are also a vehicle to cultivate new audience. Is that why you have never thought of having your own home venue?

We have never wanted to be restricted to one building. Because, for example, with Rosas, we wanted their big productions like *Rain* or *Drumming* done at the Sadler's Wells, but two years ago Rosas' Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker wanted to do a solo, which we thought was very interesting, and we did it at The Place. We have that flexibility. This year, Joseph Nadj will build his own theater within a space in Greenwich Ballet Hall, which is a huge big empty space. But he will build in a space with 180 seats.

That is very costly (laughs). Who financed that?

Actually, in a beginning it was commissioned by the French government for the Cannes Dance Festival. There was a talk of using The Place Theater, but Nadj's is a wonderful piece, so we pushed to get him the venue he wanted. So it is an advantage of being without a building. If the best place is Barbican Theatre, then we use Barbican, or Sadler's Wells, or whatever. There are also disadvantages, obviously (laugh). Like you can't control box office, for example.

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This time you are in Japan as a judge for the Toyota Choreography Award. And if you chose to present a winner of Toyota Choreography Award at your festival, I assume that Toyota would offer support. Since 30 % of your budget has been raised from individuals and corporations, do you ever consider choosing works that would certainly bring financial support for your festival?

Never. I have to say 'No.' There are festivals like that considering who's got money this year, and that affects the decisions about what they present. That is one way to operate. But we have never done that. Even this year, I think we have very good support from French government, AFAA (Association Française d'Action Artistique). But they came to us. We did not go to them. They came with the idea and we were honest about what we could do and we talked about the choice of artists we would like to present. But we would never do it "because they have money."

Obviously money is very important. Even with French this time, we were involved in serious financial negotiations. And we are still struggling to raise the large sum of money for Joseph Nadj's production, because it is very expensive and only 500 people can see it.

I would like to ask you now about Japanese artists. This is your third time coming to the Toyota Choreography Award.

Yes, but besides these last three years I've been here one time before—I think it was 12 years ago. All I can remember about that year is that the shortage of rice in Japan was the big issue in the news. The Japan Foundation brought me and I spent like 10 days. At the time there were very little happening in terms of contemporary dance, except that Rosas was performing. So I went to see some Noh theater. Most of the Japanese companies were performing overseas in some festival in Australia or New York or whatever, I believe.

Coming to the Toyota Choreography Award last few years, do you find that anything has changed?

I was amazed that they had so many applicants for this choreography award. I think 200 something people applied for it in the first year. Everybody was complaining that they only had video performances to watch. The first year it was difficult to make a choice because there was no one outstanding performance. Among the eight finalist companies we saw in 2003, it was Ikuyo Kuroda who won unanimously. I liked the works of two young men of Shintai Hyogen Circle last year. It was very funny. Some people thought it was improvised but it could not be an improvisation. I talked to them after the event and I thought maybe I could invite them. But they had nothing else. It was very interesting but it was their first thing—still it was very good for a first piece. But I could not really offer an invitation for a performance of just 20 minutes (laughs).

The number of the participants is definitely one thing which amazed me, compared with 12 years ago. Back then even a company that had emerged in Japan, all of them had a base outside of Japan such as Eiko & Koma, Ariadone, Saburo Teshigawara, all of them. There was very little support for dance, except from the Saison Foundation. Pappa TARAHUMARA, which I knew, they were mostly supported by the Saison, not by government. I like them very much for their work *SHIP IN A VIEW* but it was too big a show to get in any theater we had. We presented them in 1991 with the piece, *PARADE*. Huge installation and wonderful props, visually beautiful thing.

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Besides the number of the participants, how about quality-wise, compared to 12 years ago? Do you think Japanese choreography is unique, compared to that of Europe, for example?

I think that many Japanese artists have often come from visual arts background. They are like Saburo Teshigawara, for example, or Pappa TARAHUMARA as well. Their visual sense is very acute. Also Ikuyo Kuroda, visually there are a lot. I think also the choice of music is sometimes very eclectic. They sort of sample all kinds of different music in one show, like classics and pop, etc. Western artists are more selective.

Shen Wei—he is not Japanese, but for instance—he used *Rite of Spring*. Everybody was horrified because he did not pay attention to rhythm and whatever. In fact I think it worked very well, but most of the people were taken aback. Returning to the question of Japanese dance, there is quite a lot more Western influence now than before, partly because companies have been coming here and performing in Japan—but also Japanese people have been studying in Europe. Like Ikuyo at Laban Centre, and I think also some other dancers have traveled. A lot of people seem to be trained in ballet originally. Of course the boys of Shintai Hyogen Circle are different (laughs). In the first Toyota Award one or two dancers seem to be coming from more of a disco dancing background, which was interesting. But most of them seem to have ballet training and at a very high level. In fact, ballet companies in U.K. we have a lot of Japanese, and they are very good. And American modern dance companies also have many good Japanese dancers, I believe.

I hate the idea that everything is becoming kind of global. But there is more blurring of the edges than before. I think it is true that people are becoming more international. People can keep more pure if they go abroad—like Eiko & Koma in New York, they do what they like to do. They have not been influenced by the outside, mostly they have what they had developed. Ariadone does the same thing in France, they do their own thing.

Which type do you personally find more attractive, Western influenced or exclusively Japanese works, where they just do what they want?

I would not divide it that way. It is a question of whatever is successful as a work.

In other words, you don't really try to find Japanese-ness or Japanese uniqueness behind the piece but just try to see it from a purely artistic viewpoint.

I think you can say that. What is good comes through. A couple of things I saw in the videos of Toyota Choreography Award looked interesting. But I would not be looking at them as to whether it is Japanese—but just if it is really good. The same thing was discussed for “France Moves.” what is French. But it was really hard. In the U.K. we have a lot of artists whom we call “British” but actually there are not.

Once in a while you have produced tours. Do you have any plans to have a Japanese company tour in the U.K.?

I would have liked, if it had been possible, to have a tour for Ikuyo Kuroda when we invited her last time. But we did not have money at the time. But it would be something that we would look at. If there is a small-scale thing or if there is a soloist, yes, we will certainly consider it.

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For instance, with Ikuyo, is her work something you would never see in U.K. or in Europe?

It is different. It has a different flavor. I think people would have enjoyed it. When Kim Itoh came, he was really well received—it was not with us, though. It was a small tour. So, yes, I am interested in producing a tour, but it is just a question of money.

Do you ever decide what to present based only on what you have seen on a DVD or video?

Hardly ever. I have to see the real show. We had one or two that we decided on before unfortunately with video. One time we presented a company from a long way—not from Japan. Their video was terrific. But in the end it turned out that the video was just 20 minutes of the best part. It turned out to be a mistake. Every year we take a big risk with British. We put them on the schedule but we do not know what they will do. So at least 40% of the festival will be a risk. I don't need any risk with the remaining 60% of the schedule. So I would prefer to know exactly what we will have, what we are doing.

So in order to present Japanese companies, you really have to come here to see them. Or you can come to the Japan Society in New York—which is much easier than coming to Japan (laughs).

Yes, I saw Eiko & Koma in New York, Ariadone in Paris. Yes it is easier to do it that way.

Since you have to see the actual performances first, are there any festivals you always go to?

There are a number of festivals which you can rely on. For example, going to New York for the arts presenters' annual conference APAP in January—because all kinds of things are happening at the showcases. You can see a lot of work. The disadvantage of something like that is you are seeing only half-an-hour or 20 minute performances, you cannot be sure if the whole thing is OK.

For example, at the Hamburg festival you see a lot in whole shows. But you would have to be watching works from 9 a.m. in a morning and wouldn't finish until around midnight—but you would see the whole show, which is really good. But it requires a lot of toughness (laughs).

Last year, I did not go but my colleague Betsy Gregory went to Madagascar to see a festival there of Africans' work, which is actually put on by AFAA, the French government organization.

We also go to the Johannesburg festival, again we could see a lot of work in one place at one time. We've been to Tel Aviv three times. Again, it's very good. But I have to say the last time the political situation was unstable and it was not comfortable.

There have been festivals in town of Talin in Estonia, and also I have been to Moscow.

So we do travel a lot. Sometimes it is depressing. Sometimes my younger colleagues come back and say, "Oh my god, I did not see anything." I know it's about time and money. You felt pressure. But you have not really wasted your time. Maybe you did not see you wanted, but you have always seen something.