



Photo: Juergen Fehrmann

**Ms. Bettina Masuch**

Director of Dance in August (Tanz im August)



<http://www.tanzimaugust.de/>

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## Presenter Interview プレゼンター・インタビュー

### Dance in August, a festival born in "West Germany"

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This year marks the 25th holding of Berlin's international dance festival Dance in August (Tanz im August) to be held this year from August 16 to 31 with major theaters around the city, including HAU, Sophiensaele, Haus der Berliner Festspiele and Volksbühne as its main venues. This festival was launched in 1988, two years before the reunification of East and West Germany. At the time, the Berlin Wall isolated West Berlin as an island of the West within the borders of East Germany, which made it virtually impossible to invite foreign companies to the city. The naming of [West] Berlin as a European "Capital of Culture" in 1988 led to the reopening of the city's Hebbel Theater (which had been closed due to financial difficulties since 1978). Today it is run along with two other theaters as Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) and it was the initial artistic director, Nele Hertling, who launched the Dance in August festival with the aim of opening a "window to the world" by inviting internationally renowned contemporary dance companies to Berlin (subsequently the festival would be jointly run by HAU and TanzWerkstatt Berlin). In this interview we spoke with former HAU dance department director and now the 25th festival's director, Bettina Masuch, who talks about the present direction of Dance in August and this year's program.

Interviewer: Akiko Yamashita, journalist

Would you begin by telling us about how Dance in August was established and what its initial concept was?

It was the artistic director of Hebbel Theater, Nele Hertling, who started Dance in August 25 years ago. It was before I had begun working in the dance field, so I only know about the early situation from what others involved at the time have told me, but they all have said repeatedly that in the era when East and West Germany were still divided there was no established contemporary dance scene to speak of in Germany.

At the time the Berlin Wall divided East and West Berlin and West Berlin stood isolated as what was referred to as a "landlocked island" in the middle of East Germany. Within that isolation there was the desire among people in West Berlin to bring in a fresh breath of air and new trends from the outside. People wanted to see and know what was happening in the outside world, so the festival's aim was to "open a window to the world" by inviting internationally renowned companies to Berlin. I believe that this was the big motivation behind the launch of Dance in August. Today it is easy to invite foreign companies to Berlin, but at the original core of this festival is still the

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desire to know, to see and they have exchanges with the world's dancers and dance scene.

Dance in August changed the environment in Berlin. Among the dancers that were invited to Berlin, some chose to stay, and the festival's impact led others to want to work with fellow dance artists abroad. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought big changes to the Berlin dance scene and Dance in August played an important role in stimulating that change.

Speaking of "a window to the world" makes me think of the Berlin International Film Festival. The film festival was another event that connected isolated West Berlin to the rest of the world.

Yes, it was. And another was Berlin's annual international theater festival Theatertreffen.

So, windows to the world were opened one after another through film, theater and dance.

Yes. There was a fear at the time that West Berlin would be left behind from the rest of the free world.

Were there other places in Germany besides West Berlin where performances by foreign companies could be seen?

There may have been a few, but at the time Germany had many public municipal theaters with their own dance ensembles, which meant that their budgets went to maintaining those companies and staging their performances and left no budget for inviting in foreign companies. So, when Hebbel Theater was reopened, Hertling adopted what at the time was a completely new policy of not maintaining a resident ensemble and instead using that budget to put together a program of invited performances. While other theaters struggled to maintain their own resident ensembles, Hebbel Theater with its program of outside invited performances became a very successful theater in Berlin.

Hebbel Theater was funded by the State of Berlin, wasn't it?

That's correct. And the funds were allotted for bringing in outside performances rather than for supporting a resident ensemble. After that, allotting funds for co-producing productions with other theaters around Europe also became an accepted practice.

After Hertling's term as director, Matthias Lilienthal assumed the position of director in 2003. At the same time Hebbel Theater came under new administration together with two other theaters as Hebbel am Ufer (HAU). That move then placed Dance in August under the administration of HAU rather than Hebbel Theater, didn't it?

When Hertling started Dance in August, he outsourced part of the operations to Ulrike Becker and André Thériault at TanzWerkstatt Berlin (with its studio space and residency program). When Lilienthal became artistic director, the festival came under the joint organization of HAU and TanzWerkstatt, and it was then curated by four people; two from HAU and two from TanzWerkstatt.

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However, it soon became clear that running a festival with two organizations and four directors was very complex and often led to an increase in expenses. That is why for this 25th anniversary holding of the Dance in August festival the system has been changed so there is now only one director in charge of curation, and I have been given that responsibility.

As for the production team, it consists of only two people; myself and one other staff person. In addition there is one other person who helps us on a half-time basis for about half the year. The publicity work is outsourced, while tasks like the stage technician work and graphic design, etc., are done with the cooperation of internal staff from the various departments of HAU. By the way, it has been decided that the director for the 2014 and 2015 festivals will be Virve Sutinen. She is a very capable person who has experience as director of the Stockholm contemporary dance festival.

Would you tell us what the budget is for this year's Dance in August festival?

The overall budget is roughly 800,000 euro (approx. 14 million yen). Of that, about half, 400,000 euro comes from the Berlin's Capital Cultural Fund (a fund established in 1999 when the capital was moved to Berlin to fund cultural programs befitting the capital), 200,000 euro comes from the Berlin state government, 100,000 from HAU and the remaining 100,000 from ticket sales. Last year, total attendance for the festival was 17,000, which was an all-time record, and our aim this year is to try to attract an even larger audience.

The responsibility of running Dance in August with such a limited staff and budget must be quite difficult.

It is, because there is so much that has to be done. This is also a commemorative year and we want to give the festival a program worthy of the 25th anniversary.

Dance in August uses not only the HU theaters but also numerous other theater venues around the city.

Even though there is only one director this time, the festival's concept hasn't changed. We still aim to tie up with as many partners as possible this year. However, in the past we were able to use many of the theaters around the city for free, but in the past few years all of the theaters have undergone budget cuts. So, now we have to pay to use all of the theaters other than our HAU theaters. In order to make the festival a citywide event, we want to stage events at as many venues as possible and we are deciding on venues while monitoring our budget closely. In addition to the Sophiensaele, Haus der Berliner Festspiele and Volksbühne we have used for the festival until now, this year we add Theater der Parkaue, where children's theater is performed, and other new venues including the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum and the St. Agnes Church.

The Hamburger Bahnhof is a museum of contemporary art and the St. Agnes Church is a former Catholic church that has been renovated into a gallery space. In the press release issued the other day there was also the announcement that the points of connection between dance and the fine arts will be an important theme in this year's

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### Dance in August festival.

In both of these venues will be sites of projects where dance and fine arts artists will come together and focus on the connecting points between dance and fine arts.

In recent years, we are seeing a global trend in which art museums are opening themselves to the performing arts. The Tate Modern in London now has dance and performance events on its program, and the same is true of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. It isn't happening yet in Berlin, so I believe that exploring the connections between the two arts at Dance in August this time will serve to open up a new area for exploration.

I would like to ask you now about your personal history. You are from Solingen, which is also where Pina Bausch is from. Did this fact have an influence on your entering the dance field?

Yes, it naturally did. In fact, the home where I was born and raised is not far from Pina Bausch's family home. It was about when I was a teenager that Pina became the artistic director of the ballet company of the Wuppertal municipal theaters. At the time, the Wuppertal municipal theaters had several performances a year in Solingen, including some of the first original [dance] works. At first the audience rejected those works very strongly, with the reaction going beyond mere criticism to the point that some people even tried to destroy the stage. My parents were annual members of the Solingen Theater and I was studying ballet at the time, so we went to see the performances. I believe it was probably Kontaktthof that we saw, and neither my parents or myself could understand the work. I believe people were hoping to see more actual dancing. But, the work stayed in my mind and I felt the need to go see it again.

Pina Bausch was bringing to the stage aspects of society that most people didn't want to see. I spent my youth seeing her works and they taught me the importance of looking at society with a critical eye. For me, the art of Pina Bausch was a school that taught me how to look at things, society and reality. I believe that is what nurtured my eye for theater and other contemporary arts. At home I didn't learn how to take a subject and develop it through experimentation or how to experiment with new forms. It was by watching Pina Bausch's works that I learned the meaning of that kind of experimentation and how experimentation could be used to create spaces of freedom in both ideological and emotional senses. For this, I am very grateful to her.

You studied ballet when you were a child, and did you then study dance when you went to University of Giessen?

After encountering the art of Pina Bausch, my interest in classical ballet faded. So, I decided to study theater and entered the Institute of Applied Theater Studies at University of Giessen. As a new course at the time it had an entrance exam, unlike other universities (\*German universities do not usually have entrance examinations). It was a course limited to just 20 students per year and the classes were divided about half and half between theory and practical studies. Also, our study of theater history didn't begin with ancient theater but rather the curriculum concentrated on 20th century experimental theater, with Brecht, Gertrude Stein and Robert Wilson being the important figures. And, we learned the practical skills of theater by actually acting on

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stage and directing. Being able to study with equal emphasis on theory and practice was something completely new in Germany at the time. In that way, then opportunity to experience the practice rather than taking a purely intellectual approach was most important for me.

Was the subject matter in the applied theater studies course primarily verbal theater or dance theater?

It was both. Rather, I would say that our professor, Andrzej Wirth, always told us students not to pursue theater that already exists but to look to the future and try to create the theater that we want to see. In other words, we had to invent new theater. The theme of our studies was to always pursue theater of the future, not existing theater. In that way, my studies at the University of Giessen opened up new horizons for me.

In the past you have also worked as a curator of the dance department at HAU, haven't you?

From 2003 to 2008 I was a curator with the dance department planning and implementing my own program each month. I also participated in the direction of Dance in August as a HAU representative. And, I also did curation for the small contemporary dance festival "Context" that we held every February.

Next year you will be taking the position as director of the DanceHouse (tanzhaus) in Dusseldorf in Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) state.

The DanceHouse brings together a good mix of the various models involved with dance. There is a very strong set of program such as educational programs and seminars for amateurs of all ages, from children to adults. Besides that, there are programs for creating new works and working actively with theaters around Europe on co-productions. It is a shame that there isn't this kind of center in Berlin. Also, in NRW there is Folkwang University of the Arts and the Hochschule of Music and Dance in Cologne where students can study dance at the university level, and there is also the PACT center for choreography. NRW has a very active dance scene, with such organizations and choreographers as Tanztheater Wuppertal, Neuer Tanz, Raimund Hoghe, VA Wölfl and Martin Schläpfer. I am looking forward very much to working there.

I would like to ask you about this year's Dance in August program. Is it planned as a program that looks back over the festival's 25-year history?

Yes. The big question was how to deal with the history. Works of fine art remain, but dance is something that is gone after the performance is over. Especially in the case of contemporary dance, the works are seldom preserved as repertory. If we had the budget we could perhaps re-create pieces that were done 25 years ago, but since that wasn't possible we planned to review what was important in dance at the time Dance in August began.

To address the "post-modern dance" movement that had emerged in New York at the time, a group of early pieces by Tricia Brown will be presented at Hamburger Bahnhof Museum under the title *Early Works* along with the old Steven Paxton work *Bound*.

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We will also have a feature on the artist Iztok Kovač, whose works were introduced at Dance in August when he was young. The feature will trace his career over the 25 years that brought him to recognition as a choreographer. Also, Tino Sehgal, who is also active in the fine arts, will present a work using three dancers that spans all the dance styles of the 20th century. We have also invited the active Singaporean artist Choy Ka Fai with his work *Notion: Dance Fiction*. This is a work in which electric stimulus is applied via a computer to the human muscles to control the person's movement. It attempts to reproduce movements from Pina Bausch choreography. Instead of having emotions dictate movement, pre-choreographed movement is input into the computer and analyzed in order to convert the data into electronic impulses that will move the parts of the body. It can be seen as a veritable reversal of Pina Bausch's thought process in that it attempts to then insert emotions into the movements produced in that artificial way. It is an experiment in the ways of passing on to the next generations the history and traditions of dance and the choreographed works of the past. In sports medicine electronic impulses are already being used to strengthen muscles, but in the field of dance such practice has only just begun. We plan to present this work as a lecture performance. This is a work that I first saw at Kyoto Experiment 2012 and invited to Dance in August based on that.

Looking at your program this year's festival we see that you have invited works by Faustin Linyekula of the Congo, Boyzie Cekwana of South Africa and Panaibra Canda of Mozambique. We have also noticed that many works by African choreographers are also being presented at places like Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt and Dusseldorf's Tanzmesse.

In addition to dance from Africa, I believe that too little of the dance of Asia is being introduced. Today we can easily travel around the world, and there are many places where works are being created. For example, there are many students from Africa and Asia now studying at P.A.R.T.S. (the contemporary dance school in Brussels founded by Rosas and De Munt/La Monnaie). The students who have studied here are the going back to their countries and creating their own works. Also, last year I went to Bangalore in India and met artists who are creating works under much more difficult conditions than ours. Even though they have little in the way of funds, I was inspired to see choreographers whose desire to express themselves drives them to create works nonetheless. I am interested in young choreographers with the ability to apply the traditional rules but not be restricted by them, so they are able to create works freely and with elements of play. In European terms, it is close to what is called "Nouveau Flamenco." In the same way that people are creating Flamenco works now with a freer use of the rules of Flamenco, this young generation of choreographers are using traditional elements in new ways, or even discarding them to create very interesting works. I find it very stimulating.

### \*Ufer Studios:

This new base for contemporary dance was established in 2010 in the Wedding district of Berlin. The old red-brick train maintenance facility was renovated to create a facility with 14 studios of various sizes, offices and ateliers. The facility serves as the base for the Inter-University Center for Dance, Tanzfabrik and ada Studio. With support from the state lottery foundation, Ufer Studios GmbH operates the facility.

In 2010, the Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum für Tanz (HZT) was established in Ufer Studios to teach dance at the university level, and this has served a so-called incubator function for dance artists in Berlin. Ufer Studios(\*) is the venue where Berlin Dance Night (Tanznacht Berlin: a festival for introducing the newest works created in the Made in Berlin project), and last year there was a tie-up between it and Dance in

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August for the first time.

That tie-up was a great success. This year is the 35th anniversary of the founding of Tanzfabrik, the organizers of Berlin Dance Night, and on the last day we will be celebrating our anniversaries together. By giving the people from around the world for Dance in August the opportunity to be introduced to the works of dancers active in Berlin, I believe this tie-up is very meaningful. I definitely hope that my successor as director of Dance in August will continue it.

It has been 25 years now since Dance in August was established. Does the festival still have the same purpose as when it was launched, to show the audience the works of prominent international companies?

Yes, it does. And, I believe that this basic stance will not change in the future. There are other festivals like Tanztage each year at Sophiensaele that present the works of young emerging artists. Ufer Studios has also become established as a venue for presenting their works. The aim of Dance in August is not to nurture future talent but to stimulate young artists by inviting artists from around the world who have already won a position of recognition on the dance scene and in that way energize the Berlin dance scene.

I won't be the festival's director next year but I hope it will continue to pursue its original concept of "internationality." As a festival, I hope that Dance in August will continue to show the development of the art of dance by seeking to reveal what the new directions are in dance around the world, what techniques and styles exist and what is happening currently in the contemporary dance world.

However, there are also issues that must be addressed. Even though Dance in August is referred to as Germany's largest dance festival, the festival budget is too small. There are complaints that the world's important companies are rarely seen in Berlin, and when Dance in August tries to get these companies to come, we are told that our festival doesn't produce new works and that there is no program for co-production. In order to try to do both presentation of performances and production of works requires long-term budget commitments. I strongly hope that efforts will be made to strengthen the festival's financial base in the future.

I want to thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to kindly give us this interview.

The aim of Dance in August is to introduce the German audience to international companies, while my new job in Dusseldorf will involve supporting and nurturing choreographers and dancers active in Germany. So, I hope I will be able to help strengthen the connections between Berlin and Dusseldorf. I have been told that the Dusseldorf audience has very high standards, so I am looking forward to my new job there.