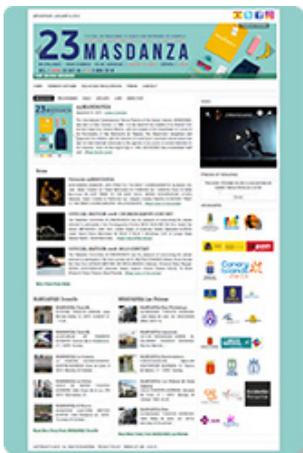




Natalia Medina

MASDANZA

<http://www.masdanza.com/english/>



MASDANZA received on January 24, 2019 the EFFE Label, Europe's quality stamp for remarkable arts festivals showing their engagement in the field of the arts, community involvement and international openness. We are very proud of this quality stamp by this program of the European Union and are even more determined to continue with our work.

Also, it is worth mentioning that our Director, Ms. Natalia Medina received on June 23, 2018 the Title of Special Daughter of the City of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, in recognition to her trajectory and contribution to dance and the social and cultural development of the capital city of Gran Canaria.

Yokohama Dance Collection MASDANZA Award winners are:

Miki Hoei (2008), Maki Tabata (2009), Yumi Osanai (2010), Azusa Takeuchi (2011), Chikako Kaito (2012), Miwa Okuno (2013), Ruri Mito (2014), Haruka Kajimoto (2015), Haruka Watanabe (2016), Ryu Suzuki (2017), Kim Seo Youn (2018)

Presenter Interview プレゼンター・インタビュー

Connecting the World in the Canary Islands MASDANZA International Contemporary Dance Festival

カナリア諸島で世界がつながる
国際ダンスフェスティバル「マスダンザ」

With its history as a stopover for ships crossing the Atlantic between Europe and the Americas, the Canary Islands (Autonomous Community of Spain) today are best known as an international tourist destination. Today, these scenic islands are also known for the MASDANZA International Contemporary Dance Festival, for contemporary dance. The festival centers on its solo and group dance competitions, while also featuring a varied program including showcases and workshops, a break dance championship and more. It has also developed into a noted international platform for a network of the dance festivals of many countries, including Japan's Yokohama Dance Collection, where it has established a MASDANZA Award to invite winners to its festival. To learn about the MASDANZA festival, which started out as a competition for choreographers in 1996, we spoke with the festival's founder and continuing artistic director, Natalia Medina.

Interviewer: Takao Norikoshi [dance critic]

Exchange with Asia, beginning from Yokohama

After beginning as a competition for local choreographers, MASDANZA has evolved to become an international contemporary dance festival. The Yokohama Dance Collection in Japan is among the festivals you have exchanges with, beginning from the 11th holding in 2006, when you invited Japanese dancers to your festivals. Could you tell us how this connection began?

When the founding director of the Yokohama Dance Collection (launched 1996), Makoto Ishikawa (first director of the Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse No. 1. Died 2014) first heard about MASDANZA, invited me through the Spanish Embassy to attend the 2006 Collection. From its 10th holding in 2005, MASDANZA had begun tie-ups with other European organizations and had invited dancers from Israel. However, until that time, I had never seen a Japanese piece, so I said that I definitely wanted to, and I came to Yokohama.

The first time I ever saw Japanese contemporary dance I was mesmerized and couldn't move. I was so impressed. Especially wonderful was "Disappearance - noise-act" by Anna that won the "Yokohama Prize for a Brilliant Future." There were five dancers in the middle of the stage moving between each other at amazing speed, and the concept it presented was completely new. I invited this company to apply to

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MASDANZA and they were the first Japanese company to perform in our Festival.

What a dynamic chain of action to see them in Yokohama in February and have them performing at MASDANZA in October. What was the response from your audiences?

I believe our audiences at MASDANZA hadn't ever seen dance like theirs either. They all said it was wonderful. I felt like I had opened a new window for them. The following year, 2007, I invited Ishikawa-san to join our MASDANZA jury, and I had him speak about Japanese dancers, and we also had discussions about the possibilities of collaborations. Then, from 2008, we established the MASDANZA Award at the Yokohama Dance Collection, which officially began our collaborative relationship. Every time I come to Yokohama I get to know lots of people, and notable among the opportunities that have come from this have been the working relationships that I have established with the South Korean guests.

In 2008, Miki Hoi won the MASDANZA Award with her piece "LINE," and the Korean dancer Young Jun Park (who has now changed her stage name to Young Cool Park) who was performing his piece "Dreaming Bodies" at the same time was also very good. So I invited him to send an application for MASDANZA also. As a result he received the Second Prize from the Jury in the Choreography Contest that year. Later, we also established a working relationship with the SIDance (Seoul) festival director Jung-ho Lee.

By the way, Hoi-san's "LINE" won the 13th MASDANZA Best Performer Award in 2008, which she then toured the Canary Islands with. The Japanese dancers we have invited to MASDANZA have included Chikako Kaido (who won our 17th Solo Competition), Haruka Watanabe (who won our 21st Solo Competition and Audience Award), Ruri Mito (who won our 19th Solo Competition) and Miwa Okuno (who won our 18th Solo Competition) among others. So, there have been a good number who have made a strong impression and the majority have received awards both from the Jury and from the audience.

Japanese dancers who win the MASDANZA Award at the Yokohama Dance Collection are invited to participate in the MASDANZA festival, and many more have participated in the MASDANZA competitions through their own open call applications. One who left a particularly strong impression was Emily Tanaka, who performed her piece "Cube" in our 16th competition. She is such a beautiful dancer, and with that piece she won the Solo Competition. Watanabe Hisashi-san, who participated in our 22nd festival (2017), won the Audience Award and the ACORÁN Award of the Canary Arts Association with his very impressive physicality that surprised us all. After that, he stayed on in Zaragoza for about two months I am told.

Through the Yokohama Dance Collection, you were able to expand your network to South Korea and China, weren't you? Now you have become the most frequent visitor to Asian dance festival of any director in Spain, haven't you?

Yes, that's true. To our 14th festival in 2009, we invited three choreographers from Beijing, China to do a presentation titled "Three Points," and their work won our Choreographer Competition. As for South Korea, besides the SIDance festival, in 2016 we established the "Asian Solo & Duo Challenge for MASDANZA" competition at the

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(*) Gran Canaria Island

Spain's Canary Islands (autonomous community) is an archipelago of seven main islands including Gran Canary and Tenerife Island in the northern half of the Atlantic Ocean. The capital of the Islands and its largest city in population (400,000), Las Palmas, is located on the island of Gran Canaria (population: 840,000) and has a history of prosperity as a layover port for ships crossing the Atlantic between Europe and Central and South America. Today, the Island is a world-famous tourist destination with sites like the old town area of Vegueta that retains historical buildings from the Age of Exploration and was designated a World Heritage in 1990, the famous beach of Las Canteras and the vast Maspalomas sand dunes.

NDA (New Dance for Asia) International Festival.

For the people in the Canary Islands, the opportunity to see dance from places other than Europe is a very valuable thing. Because it gives them the opportunity to see that there is wonderful dance from other countries that are completely different, both politically and socially. It is a rich and rewarding opportunity to experience cultural differences. Promoting development of the Canary Islands and its culture through such experiences is one of the important goals of MASDANZA.

Background

Would you tell us what it was that originally got you involved in dance?

I was born and raised on the island of Gran Canaria (*) in the Canarian archipelago, and I still live there today. Many family members live there too, so I can't imagine living anywhere else. I began ballet lessons when I was 13, but I had the feeling that in my body there was a potential for many other kinds of expression. When I explored those possibilities, I found there was also music in me, and the possibility to travel to many different lands. As I began to think that way, I developed a longing to go into contemporary dance.

I studied physical education at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria that opened in 1989, and then I got a master's degree in stage art at the University Rey Juan Carlos in Madrid. Since there was no course of dance that one could get a degree in at a college in the Canary Islands, I had to go to universities in Madrid and Barcelona to get degrees. After getting my degrees, I worked as a high school physical education teacher for five years, while also teaching dance at my own dance school in the afternoon. It was in 1993 that I started my own dance school, where I taught contemporary dance and classical ballet. To the school I invited choreographers from various places, and that is how I got to know José Reches and Dominick Borucki.

José was the choreographer for the dance company 10&10 Danza and he had me perform as a dancer in the piece he entered in a choreography contest in Madrid in 1998. That piece came in 3rd place and that started my career as a professional dancer. After Dominick and I started the company Natalia Medina Compañía de Danza in 1999, we were able to work with choreographers from Spain and other countries. My younger sister Vanessa is also a dancer with a career of performing with a variety of companies, and from 2010 I was able to leave the artistic directorship of the company and the business end of my dance school to her so I could concentrate full-time on preparations for the MASDANZA festival.

What made you decide to start the festival?

When our dance company didn't get an offer to hold performances at a big theater, I thought partly that it couldn't be helped because we weren't famous, but at the same time I got the strong desire to create a platform where small companies and emerging choreographers could perform. At the time, in the Canary Islands there was no place at all like that. On our island of Gran Canaria people often go to see ballet, but there

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are almost no opportunities to see performances of contemporary dance. Although we do have beaches and parties and carnivals (laughs). When I was a child, my mother always said that my brothers and sisters and I should go to a big city, but I believed that I could do something there on our island. There are schools and many students, so I believed it was an excellent place to have a festival. And a festival could create jobs in our city, and wouldn't that be truly a wonderful thing?

Looking at your website, it all began from the Maspalomas Choreography Contest launched in 1996, but how did you go from there to create a full-scale festival?

What I decided to do at first was to hold dance showcases and create a place for contemporary dance. What we did the first year (1996) was a choreography contest at Maspalomas. Maspalomas is an area at the southern tip of Gran Canaria Island where there is a great expanse of sand dunes. It is a beautiful place that is tolerant of gays and nudists, but it also has the problem of an aging population. I thought I would like to get the area involved in the festival.

We arranged performances of ten Canary Islands choreography groups, but we had zero audience (wry smile). We even went up to people who were passing by and asked them if they would like to see some contemporary dance at the theater. One woman who came by with two friends asked in reply, "What is contemporary dance?" Despite their surprise, they came in and were thrilled by the performances and they ended up attending MASDANZA for ten years after that. One of them said once, "I can't understand why the jury gave that piece the prize. I liked another choreographer's work better". So hearing that, we decided to establish the Audience Award, so that audiences could have their say in the Awards.

We chose five among the choreographers entered to and sent them to 13 festivals around Spain that MASDANZA had tie-ups with in places like Zaragoza and Bilbao. Paying the airfare for the five was quite a large bill, and although the government told us that they knew the importance of the MASDANZA festival, they said it was difficult to give out grants for things that didn't directly benefit the people of Spain, so from that time early on I had a strong awareness of the necessity to do things that benefit the citizens of Spain. Since I am a Spanish citizen myself, I believe that this is indeed one of our missions.

Since 1996, you have held the festival every year, and from the second year you invited not only choreographers from the Canary Islands but also from outside. In 1997, you had five groups from the Canaries and three from the Spanish mainland, and you also invited a guest company from Madrid to perform.

It became a priceless opportunity to show people from the Spanish mainland that there are many talented artists in the Canary Islands. Also, I was very surprised by the quality of the dancers of the guest company from Madrid. In 2000, we changed the festival's name to MASDANZA, and from 2001 we broadened the scope to include artists from other European countries, and after that we expanded it further to include South America, Israel and the U.S. From our eighth holding in 2003, we established solo and group divisions for the competition.

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Looking over your programs from past years we see that in addition to the competitions, you also add new programs each year.

Yes, that's right. In 2015, we held a "Dance Marathon" program for families that was very interesting. From 10:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon, each hour was devoted to different kinds of dance, including Salsa, hip-hop, dance hall, etc., and it was organized as a program where the audience could join in and dance the types of dance that people in the Canary Islands like. Having a program like this where the theater audience would not simply watch the performances but could also join in and dance the dances they are familiar with became something that attracted families to the festival. In fact, it was very effective for increasing our audience.

Before the festival, we ran advertisements, and we had the participating dance companies go to local schools for outreach programs, and the reception was very good. Then, we took turns inviting different schools to the theater. That enabled us to show dance to many children at once, and since it was done in the form of extracurricular school classes, it was very well received. Our hope is that these experiences will encourage the young people to continue going to see dance as they get older.

At MASDANZA you are also focusing efforts on creating new audiences, aren't you?

At times, we tend to get so absorbed in the things we want to see that we forget about the next generation. They are interested in rock and hip hop music and they don't listen to classical music at all. Since classical dance is hard to understand, they like dance that is easy to understand. But seen from another perspective, if young people who start out in hip-hop or breakdance start to get deeper into dance, it is possible that they can come to appreciate contemporary dance and classical dance. When I talked about this with some young men at dance school who had started out in hip-hop, some said that before they had never even thought about taking classical dance classes, but now they were enjoying taking classical classes every day. So, it is important that we bring to MASDANZA the kind of outstanding contemporary dance artists who started out in hip hop or break dance that can inspire young men like these.

Of course, we can't forget senior citizens either. In order to get them involved in the festival, we have done things like hiring people to lay a foundation for senior-oriented activities and we got the idea to introduce programs where we can get the elderly to move their bodies freely to music. We can't expect the elderly to be able to learn new dance steps, but if we tell them to listen to the music and just move to it in any way they feel, they can dance too. These kinds of programs are what make MASDANZA a festival that attracts viewers of all generations that have no previous involvement in dance.

About the Festival Competitions

We would like you to tell us in some detail about the SOLO Contest and CHOREOGRAPHY Contest that are the main programs at the MASDANZA festival.

In 2018, you had 156 applicants for the Solo Contest and 170 group applicants for

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List of 2018 MASDANZA Contest Winners

- Jury Prize for Best Choreography:

"ALANDA" (Spain); choreography by Mario Bermúdez Gil; Prize: 3,000 euro

- Jury Prize for Best Solo:

"NEREO AHOGÁNDOSE" (Spain); choreography/performance by Joaquín Collado Parreño; Prize: 2,000 euro

- Audience Prize for Best Choreography:

"RELATIONSHIPS" (China); choreography by Zhiren Xiao and Ran Sun. Prize: 1.000 Euros

- Audience Prize for Best Solo:

"Coming Home" (USA); choreography/performance by Yoshito Sakuraba. Prize: 1.000 Euros

- Special Mention of the Jury Prize in the Choreography Contest:

"RELATIONSHIPS" (China); choreography by Zhiren Xiao and Ran Sun

- Special Mention of the Jury Prize in the Solo Contest:

"BOYS DON'T CRY" (Germany); choreography/performance by Yotam Peled

the Choreography Contest from around the world. Based on the video recordings of performances submitted by these applicants, your jury narrows the field down to eight finalist contestants for each contest category to be invited to perform in the competition at MASDANZA.

The contestants that are invited to perform in our festival competitions are selected either from open call applicants or artists that our former MASDANZA contest winners or myself have seen someplace and encourage to make an open call application. The members of the open call jury include festival directors from the 13 Spanish festivals that we have tie-ups with and other specialists from the different genres. I personally am one who doesn't feel attracted to works or performances that are simply highly skilled or beautiful. I believe that it is also important to see that the artists are taking risks to try new things. So, sometimes I am told by other members of our juries, "Natalia, that piece is just too crazy." (Laughs)

How do you conduct the judging of the competitions?

They are judged by an international jury consisting of overseas choreographers, festival directors, program directors, etc. We change the jury members every year. Before the performances begin, I tell the jurors that I want them to respect each of the eight contestants in each category as if they are award winners. After we watch the performances, we take plenty of time to discuss and give our opinions about each of the eight works. We discuss all aspects of the works from their concepts and choreography to the stage art and lighting and then we narrow the contestants down to three and then vote on them. We then select the 1st to 3rd place winners for each category as well as an Audience Prize and a Best Performer Prize for the Solo competition and a Best Choreography Prize for the choreography division, and we also chose an overall Best Performance Prize from among all the works. And these prizes are not decided simply on points from the voting but from continued discussion until we reach a consensus on each prize.

The international members of our MASDANZA juries are naturally unbiased about the nationality of the winners, but sometimes we hear other people ask if it is OK if the winners are not Spanish. We also consistently hear the opinion that the important thing is to give support to Spanish dancers and choreographers, which I can understand. In fact, I serve as a juror at a number of competitions in Spain where the winners are always Spanish companies. But regarding the directors of those I always feel that I want them to know more about what is happening in the rest of the world. Even if we don't give preference to our own country's dancers and companies, the good ones will have many opportunities to go to places like Japan and Israel.

The artists who participate in the MASDANZA competitions go on to tour to other venues in Spain, don't they?

Yes. We get requests for advice from them, which may be that they want to find out how to participate in other festivals, or that they want to stay in residence in Spain for a while. For MASDANZA, the truly important thing is not the prizes or the prize money we give, but that the artists and directors build connections with festivals around the world that will give them the opportunity to work with them going forward. We want

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Public Funding

- City Hall of San Bartolome de Tirajana: 60,000 €
- Ministry of Culture of Spain: 32,500 €
- Government of the Canary Islands: 30,000 €
- Council of Gran Canaria: 15,000 €
- City Hall of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: 12,000 €
- Canary Islands Tourism Board: 9,000 €

them to know that through MASDANZA they can gain opportunities to perform on even larger stages and gain opportunities to create new works. Any opportunity to dance in a new place is a chance to open up new possibilities for themselves.

About the Festival Budget

Would you tell us about your festival's budget?

We get a total of 158,500 euro in public funding from the city of San Bartolomé de Tirajana, Spain's Ministry of Culture and the government of the Canary Islands. About half of that comes from the city of San Bartolomé de Tirajana on Gran Canaria Island. Also, from the government of the Canary Islands we get a separate budget for dance artists who participate in MASDANZA to do performance tours of the Canary Islands.

Is MASDANZA affected by the tourism policies, etc., of San Bartolome?

MASDANZA is a festival that I established, and of course we have been able to continue it through support from San Bartolome and other sources. Each has their interests and we continue to discuss them. For example, a primary interest of the government of the Canary Islands is the economic benefits of how tourists spend money in their visits, and they don't have much interest in the cultural aspects in the islands, so there is not enough money allotted in that direction. The young people spend their weekdays at school and on the weekends they party or go to the carnival, shopping or the beach, and there is no time they spend getting familiar with the arts and culture. It is not enough to just smile and laugh as we listen to music or watch movies or dance, the important thing is that the arts inspire us to think.

This year I went to the City Hall and I asked them what they thought my purpose was in traveling to places around the world to promote MASDANZA. To create and put on a dance performance requires as much time and effort as a music concert or a theater performance, and there usually isn't enough compensation received in return. But the fact that there is a lot of high-quality dance pieces being performed in the Canary Islands is proof that it is a place of knowledge and intelligence. It may be fine for some to relax on the beach in the morning. But I want to say that you should then come to the theater in the evening to see dance. Dance is a universal art, it need no words, so you can enjoy dance works from all over the world. And I told them that to be able to see lots of good dance performances in one place and time is a very precious opportunity.

Do many general tourists come to see dance at MASDANZA?

In fact, much of our MASDANZA audience is made up of tourists. With today's hotels, you can charge everything from meals to entertainment on the electric key of your room, and this system is designed so that tourists spend more money at the hotels. However, many tourists go out to restaurants in the town. Those people see our MASDANZA posters in town and many of them come to see our dance performances. This number of tourists that come to our performances continues to surprise me every year. What's more, there is a very high repeater ratio, at about 70% it is said.

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For example, the total number of tourists visiting Brazil in a year is 6.5 million (2016), but twice that number visit the Canary Islands annually, no less than 13 million! And many of the tourists that come to the Canary Islands tend to be wealthy. This large number of tourists is an important element that has made the MASDANZA festival feasible.

Do you feel that MASDANZA has had a considerable influence on the dance scene in Spain?

Three years ago, a critic wrote that Spain's dance scene has changed since the start of MASDANZA. Our MASDANZA is recognized as a very important festival in Spain, and so we receive funding every year from the Ministry of Culture. In the past, you could only see Spanish dance companies performing at festivals in localities like Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Cádiz and Bilbao, but now, through the MASDANZA network, companies from around the world now come to these festivals. Last year, artists who participated in the MASDANZA festival then toured by rail to Zaragoza, Bilbao, Cádiz and Barcelona over a two-month period. Thanks to this, audiences in those cities were able to see dancers from Taiwan and Japan perform for the first time, and their performances were well received.

One choreographer told us that MASDANZA is not a festival just for seeing dance, but a festival that one can get new revelations from, ones that helps you want to create new choreography when you get back to your own country. That is why it is important that the artists we invite to MASDANZA need to be new creators. So, we are always searching for new possibilities to help us be a platform where people from all countries can experience new encounters.

Are there some encounters with artists that you will never forget?

As I mentioned earlier, my encounters with Japanese dancers have been unforgettable, and there have been many others as well. My encounters with Lee Sun A, Eun-Young Park and JinJin of South Korea, and with Dickson Mbi of the U.K. have been some of the wonderful artists I have encountered. In Spain there are artists active now who have been with us since the early years of MASDANZA. Daniel Abreu now has a company that is active from their base in Madrid and has won numerous awards in Spain. The company called La Veronal, led by Marcos Morau, won Spain's National Dance Award in 2013. They are another company that were able to be invited to various festivals after first appearing at MASDANZA and go on to become famous. Chevi Muraday is another MASDANZA award winner who went on to win the 2006 National Dance Award and numerous other awards. Also an important artist is Chey Jurado, who was invited to the M1 Contact Contemporary Dance Festival (Singapore) this year and will perform in Yokohama Dance Collection in February 2019.

You have been watching Asian dance continuously for more than ten years now. Have you noticed any changes in it?

Since I started to see Asian dance, I was surprised very much the quality of the dancers. Their work is different to that in Europe. Where physicality and technique are concerned, I have seen very good works. I think there is a very good structure, good

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Countries participating in MASDANZA until now (as of 2017)

Argentina, Austria, Armenia, Belgium,
Bulgaria, Brasil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Co-
lombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, China, DR
of Congo, Czech Republic, Denmark, France,
Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Israel, Ja-
pan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Macedonia,
Madagascar, Mexico, Norway, The Nether-
lands, Portugal, , Sweden, Singapore, South
Korea, Slovenia, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia,
United States, United Kingdom, Uganda,
Venezuela and Spain.

schools and good universities to develop dance in Asia. But one thing is to be a good dancer and another very different one is to be a creator. In this sense, I think both in Asia and Europe the role of the creator is necessary. Today we see that many dancers create their own choreographies, every day more, and this is probably due to the lack of companies where the dancer can be just a performer.

Are there any particular countries now whose dance you are especially interested in?

The U.S., Central and South America and Russia are some. And in the Czech Republic, the contemporary dance festival Tanec Praha started by Yvona Kreuzmannová is especially active and we have invited several works from it this year. We are also collaborating with the European Dance Network (EDN) and we have invited some of the directors associated to EDN to participate as members of the International Jury Panel.

Would you tell us your vision of what the future holds for MASDANZA?

I believe that MASDANZA will continue to be an important venue for presenting contemporary dance and a platform for people to connect with each other. That is my most important mission. As for the Canary Islands, of course I want people to know about our beautiful beaches and our carnivals, but more than anything, I want to work for dance. People often tell me that I seem happiest when I am working for the festival. Without a real love of dance, I could not continue the work I am doing.