



Anna Muelter

Sophienseale

<https://sophienseale.com/en>



Jun. 1, 2020

Presenter Interview プレゼンター・インタビュー

Anna Muelter's Approach to Spreading Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

Anna Muelter is dance curator of Berlin's Sophienseale (an arts space comprising a theater space and multiple rehearsal studios) and also curator of the theater's festival *Tanztage Berlin*. Known for her support and nurturing of young female choreographers and for spending five and a half years nurturing artists with disabilities and making the theaters barrier-free, Muelter will serve from 2021 as the new artistic director of the international performing arts festival *Theaterformen*. In this interview, we ask her about curation at Sophienseale, her programs for people with disabilities and more.

Interviewer: Makiko Yamaguchi

I first met you when you were an assistant in the theater department of the *Hebbel am Ufer (HAU)* theater in Berlin.

Before HAU I was working as an intern and assistant at the *Volksbühne Theater* until 2001. I wasn't involved in production work, rather I was a member of the planning team working on the themed weekend programs. Looking back, at that time I was already involved in programs aimed at broadening the concepts of theaters and theater-making. The themed weekend program was something that Matthias Lilienthal proposed, but at the time I started working at the *Volksbühne*, he was not there anymore.

After that, there was an opening for an intern to work on the themed weekend program that Matthias has started as an opening program for the newly opening HAU theater in Berlin, so I applied for it. Because I wanted to learn various things from the person who originally proposed the themed weekend format. From that point I worked under Matthias for nine years. That format dealt with contents from across the genres, not just theater and performance but also film, literature and visual arts with a variety of events that went on to discussions and lectures. I always had an interest in looking outside the theater space for new possibilities for theater different from the traditional format. And that is exactly the kinds of programs that HAU went on to do so many of. A good example of those was "X-Wohnungen" (X-Residences) (Note: A tour project in which artists made installations in private residences or unused buildings and audience in pairs were guided through several of those different residences). So, over those nine years I was able to experience those events first-hand.

After a while, I was allowed to handle the production management for a variety of projects like that, and from 2008 I became assistant to the HAU theater curator Ste-

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

fanie Wenner. There I did production management for companies on the free scene (companies with no theater affiliation) and also began working as a dramaturg. Eventually, Matthias let me handle some small-scale curation jobs. When he became a curator at Theater der Welt in 2014, he asked me if I wanted to come along and work with him. It was a position as a collaborative artistic director. The position was one of Matthias' assistant and co-curator. In that capacity, I was able to travel to a lot of foreign festivals. After that, I thought I should try to do something more independent from Matthias (laughs), so I applied for a position as curator for the Sophiensaele dance festival Tanztage Berlin and as a dance curator at Sophiensaele.

Was it a dual post?

It was that kind of combined position. And to tell the truth, before that I had never worked in the dance field, so I had to do a lot of studying quickly (laughs). There I was, suddenly a dance curator, so I made a very thorough study of the dance scene there in Berlin. Especially regarding the younger dance artists. When I took this position in 2014, the dance program at Sophiensaele was dominated largely by established male choreographers and there were very few works by younger female choreographers. That made me think that we should be a theater that supported young female artists, but that wasn't easy to do.

Sophiensaele has almost no budget for programs. So, it is not easy to say that a particular young female choreographer has talent, so let's produce a new work by her. Individual artists had to apply for support grants, so we helped them with that. Each year we help from 60 to 70 artists apply for grants, and of them an average of about 20 are accepted, and for the works that get grants we do the production and the performances. Since the young artists aren't well known yet, there is little chance of them getting their grant applications selected.

It takes time to support and nurture young artists. It takes a lot of work and it doesn't always lead to the results that might be hoped for. Still, we believe that it is an extremely important mission. And it is a task in which both me personally and the young artists learn a lot. We have been nurturing young artists for five years now, and we are very happy to see that among the ones we have continued to support are one who have opened up their own paths and established a position as choreographers for themselves. Two of them have been selected for the Munich 2020 Tanzplattform (German Dance Platform, a contemporary dance platform held every two years in cities around Germany); they are Jule Flierl and Sheena McGrandles.

TANZTAGE is another festival with a strong focus on young artists. How much of their programming is for young artists?

TANZTAGE is also a springboard for Sophiensaele, and it presents very young choreographers from the Berlin area. In general, it focuses on young artists within five years of having graduated. It provides ongoing support for three or four artists. As I described earlier, they also help them in applying for grants. Artists get support in the form of co-productions with Sophiensaele to create works. Mostly it is for new works, and each year there are eight to ten works that premiere at TANZTAGE. After that the works are performed three or four times at the same theater.

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

We would like to hear a little more about TANZTAGE. Would you tell us about the concept or objectives and the curation?

For the TANZTAGE curation we are aided by the help of open-call applications. It is aimed at young choreographers. The submissions can be existing works and plans for next works can also be submitted. I look at all the applications. However, we don't just choose from the open-call applicants. An open call may sound very democratic, but eventually the call reaches mostly the people that are already in the contemporary dance scene. For example, it doesn't reach the urban dance scene genres like hip hop at all. I believe that TANZTAGE should be a platform for a wide range of dance. In other words, it should be a platform for a really diverse range of dance styles. So, I myself am always trying to discover a diverse range of choreographer and dancers throughout the year. Not only the graduates of arts universities. All year long I am going to all kinds of performances and working to keep connected with a diverse range of styles in the dance world.

There is one thing I have added to the TANZTAGE curation since I began doing it. I created an "Around the World" category. This festival is only for Berlin, in other words for local choreographers, but I think it is very important that these artists of the young generation stay connected to the international dance scene. And that doesn't mean only within Europe. It is easy to travel around in Europe, and despite problems like Brexit, there are plenty of networks connecting us. However, it is difficult to connect to and have exchanges with areas outside of Europe. There is the problem of visas as well. Unless the young choreographers are associated with an organization, it is difficult to get a visa. That is why it is important to create opportunities for them have contact with artists or works from outside the European area and the ideas they are based on. In fact, we often make collaborative agreements with other festivals. This year we worked with the Gender Bender Festival in Bangalore, India. It is a very interesting festival.

Another of our festival's collaborations has been with the "Let's talk about dance" project. Uferstudios (Note: A Berlin dance studio. Focused on creation of dance works, nurturing artists and dissemination of dance-related information) and HZT (Note: Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin. Higher education in dance at Berlin University of the Arts and Ernst Busch Acting School) collaborated on a five-year research project to identify a format for communication about dance works. Through workshops with invited specialists, the project sought to find ideal formats for audience to exchange opinions with each other about dance works they have seen. Rather than having a situation seen in many post-performance talks where the audience all sit facing the same direction toward the stage and ask uninteresting questions of the artists such as how many hours they practiced toward the performance, the object was to begin from the standpoint that the audience are to be considered "experts" at searching for their reactions to the work they had seen and what they felt from it. Because, if the audience can become able to talk among themselves about the dance work they just saw, certainly that would be a much more exciting and stimulating format for communication.

Especially in the case of dance, a lot of people say they don't understand it. But that isn't true at all. All of the things that people see, interpret and recognize in dance are

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

in fact correct. And it is very important that people are able to talk with other people who have seen the dance too and realize that there was nothing wrong with the things they had felt. In order for people to experience that realization, we worked out a very creative format. We never let it be a divided audience side versus the artist side, but we divide people up into small groups with an atmosphere that make even introverted people want to speak out about what they feel.

What type of audience does TANZTAGE have?

TANZTAGE is a festival that introduces only young choreographers whose names are not known yet, but now in its 29th holding it has become well known and has an established audience. What's more, young choreographers and dancers also come to see its performances. Among its regular audience are people from the general public who don't go to see other dance performances but always come to TANZTAGE. By the way, there is also something unique about when the festival is held. It is held before the end of the annual New Year's celebrations. This year it opened on January 8th, which is a little later than usual, but normally it opens on the 3rd or 4th of January. Since it is the only festival held so early in the year, it gets more attention, and a lot of media coverage, which helped it become well known throughout Berlin. It is even covered on Berlin's main TV news programs. As for the actual attendance, the tickets are generally all sold out. As I have said repeatedly, its programming consists exclusively of you, unknown choreographers' works. Sophiensaele is also famous, but the TANZTAGE festival name is also very well known.

That is indeed wonderful to hear. May I ask you next about the kind of work you do Sophiensaele?

At Sophiensaele itself my work is curating themed festivals. Besides dance, we also have theater, most of which is experimental theater works. Sophiensaele is what is known as a production house, which means we are different from many German public theaters that have their own resident ensembles. We work with so-called independent artists and companies that are not affiliated with any particular theater. They apply for and receive their own grants and then we work together collaboratively with them to create and perform works.

Since you started working as a curator at Sophiensaele, we hear that you have established a strong program for people with disabilities.

From two or three years ago we have placed an emphasis on "Disabilities and Artists with Disabilities" as a program theme at Sophiensaele. It wasn't something that I proposed first, but Sophiensaele's artistic director Franziska Werner and the people in all our other departments, including public relations, administration, technical departments and the production department, and since it is a theme that involves all the departments, it is important that everyone has joined together to work actively on this theme. The barriers for artists with disabilities are different and varied depending on their individual disabilities. And those differences come into play in complex ways at different levels, so we have to consider numerous things at once.

Speaking in specific terms, we designate three "Ps," namely, 1-Program, 2-Publikum (the Public/audience) and 3-Personnel (our staff working at the theater) as out

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

important areas. Concerning the Program area, we program works for artists with disabilities so that people can see works for disabled artists at the theater. As for the second area, the Public, we have to make the theater barrier-free and offer a variety of services so that people with disabilities can come to the theater. Lastly, Personnel stands for the efforts that all of our people working at the theater participate in this theme on an organization-wide scale. This focus on diversity is the same as the efforts we make as an organization to actively employ people with immigrant backgrounds.

Berlin's dance scene is unbelievably diverse in terms of color, nationality, sexual orientation and gender, but in spite of this fact, there are almost no artists with disabilities. The same is true at the amateur and beginner levels. I believe we have to make more efforts to present artists who have disabilities. At Sophiensaele we work primarily with artists from Berlin, and there was a problem that there were too few artists here with disabilities. So, we proposed a new program titled "Making a Difference." Fortunately, in Germany we have a dance support program named Dance Pact Local-Regional-National for which the public sector at the local, regional and national levels cooperatively dedicate budget to promoting dance, and we are able to receive financing from them. If we get this support, it is possible to do quite a large-scale project in dance. Since the Making a Difference program operates as a coalition of eight partner organizations in Berlin (the Sophiensaele and seven other theaters, studios and universities), we are able to invite the people with disabilities to participate dance by offering dance workshops for beginners from which they can develop and interest in dance. We also offer residencies and research labs to dancers with disabilities and choreographers as a means to further develop their potential.

It has been just about two years since we started this program. It is functioning well to empower disabled artists and the dance world is changing as a result, which I am very glad to see. Artists who didn't even know of each other's existence are now able to have very fruitful exchanges. Also, they are now able to go to performances on the general dance scene. Through open discussions and the like, they have also become able to give their own opinions about matters. This is something that was never seen before.

Is the Making a Difference project for people with physical disabilities? Does it also include mental and emotional disabilities?

It is for people with physical and perceptual disabilities. It includes people with movement disorders as well as people with sight or hearing impairments. The most important principal of this project is Disabled Leadership, the ability of people with disabilities to assume leadership roles. Since this is the central guiding concept, the artistic directing is performed by the disabled artists. For example, when we have a workshop, the workshop leader is and disabled artist, and when we have a research lab, a disabled artist is the leader in charge of the artistic aspects.

What this project seeks to do is not community art but to support individual artists. The support aims to bring them up to the level where they can create their own works like other artists and are able to apply for grants by themselves. The current issue that must be addressed is that, despite the large number of educational dance pro-

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

grams, most of them are not accessible to people with disabilities. One reason is that the venues are not barrier-free, and another is that often it is not possible for them to access the curriculum. Because the requirements are such that even people with a certain level of physical capability have a hard time meeting the demands. Also, unless it is stated clearly that the program accepts people with disabilities, it is often difficult for the disabled to attempt to access them. And, because there are in fact very few opportunities to see performances by dancers with disabilities, even among young people with disabilities few will think of or aspire to become a dancer. This is also a problem of the lack of role models for such people. As a result, almost all of the dance artists with disabilities today are self-taught. That is why we are focusing on supporting and nurturing artists through this program.

There are also a variety of other programs, and they are all connected to each other. One of them that is held every other year calls for artists with disabilities to apply for grants and then invites them to give performances. Because there are so few such artists in Berlin, most of the artists appearing in this program are invited from outside Berlin. Many of them are invited from the UK, where the so-called "Unlimited" program has continued supporting artists with disabilities for years since the 2012 London Olympics. In the UK, the holding of the London Olympics became the impetus for devoting large budgets for nurturing artists with disabilities with a commitment that has lasted ten years. This program has succeeded in producing wonderful artists.

As for the second area of Publikum (the Public/audience), what measures have been taken to make the theaters barrier-free so that a broader spectrum of the public can use the theaters?

Because of the great cost involved in such measures as re-outfitting elevators in order to make theaters barrier-free, many organizations tend to think it is nearly impossible from the outset. However, there are a number of measures that can be taken at no cost, or at least very little cost. The most important thing is to change the awareness and the attitude of the personnel working at the theater.

The important thing is for the personnel working at the theater to learn how to deal with visitors and their wide variety of disabilities. This involves acquiring a high level of sensitivity and delicacy in terms of the way they talk to the disabled. One of the most frequent mistakes occurs when a wheelchair user comes to the theater with an attendant or caregiver pushing their wheelchair. The mistake comes when the theater personnel talk to the attendant instead of to the person in the wheelchair. As a rule, the personnel should speak to the person in the wheelchair. And this is a mistake that can be easily remedied simply by coaching or advising the theater staff. And for this instruction to be effective, the person who does the coaching or advising should be a specialist who is also disabled person. Another important thing is that a theater show in fine detail the degree and specifications of its barrier-free facilities and measures. For example, pamphlets should be prepared that not only show where the elevators are but also the size of the elevators. The size of the entrances to the barrier-free restrooms should also be shown. There is great diversity in the types and degrees of disabilities people have, so it is important that the disabled be given all the information they need to know if they can enter the restroom or not.

<https://sophiensaale.com/en/vermittlung/barrierefreiheit>

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

Another thing we do is to allot an “early boarding” period for most performances. There is no added expense for this at all. It is simply a matter of how things are organized. In the case of non-reserved seating, many visitors crowd the entrances at opening time in order to get the seats they want. This can make it difficult for persons with disabilities to even enter the theater. This is also true of people in wheelchairs or on crutches or people like the elderly who have difficulty walking. So, for these people who need assistance, we open the theater to them 10 minutes early. This allows them to easily choose the type of seating they need. For example, normally people who are visually challenged want to sit right up in the front rows, but if they suffer from narrowing of visual field, they may want to sit in the back of the theater. Different people have different needs. By allotting an early boarding period, we can accommodate people who suffer from chronic pain and need to bring a cushion or the like, or people who need a place to stretch out with their body sideways. This kind of response can be performed by us quickly and easily. For early boarding, we announce the time at ten minutes before opening and specify which entrance(s) to use. This kind of clear and specific information that is necessary. This type of accommodation sends a clear message to the disabled that they are welcome at the theater. It shows them that the theater is thinking about them.

As part of our barrier-free measures we also offer a “touch tour” service that provides audio descriptions of performances. Using headsets, users can get an “audio description” of a dance performance that enables them to visualize what is happening. This is a measure that gives the visually challenged access to visual arts like dance. For these touch tours we have the participants come 75 minutes before the performance and they are led on stage and the staff in charge of the tour’s audio description describe the stage space to the participants and take them around to actually touch the stage art and props. Walking around the stage also gives them a palpable sense of its size. The performer also come out for a short time to meet the tour participants so they get an idea of the types of people that will be performing and descriptions of the costumes they are wearing. The audio descriptions are done by young choreographers who are used to seeing and depicting dance, and this is another very important aspect of this service. They participate in a two-day workshop to learn about the methodology and points to be aware of. Having them become involved in the audio description program increases their awareness of barrier-free and audio description and encourages them to extend that awareness to their own creative process. I think that is a wonderful synergistic effect of the program. We initiated the touch tour service in the 2019 TANZTAGE festival, and after that I became part of the Sophiensaele programs as well. Of course, we don’t offer it every day, only about once a month. But, offering it like that on a regular basis is an effective means to cultivate new audience among the visually challenged.

Another program we have is called “relaxed performance.” This is a program that is practiced on a fairly large scale in the UK, and we were the first theater in Germany to introduce it. It is based on an awareness of neurodiversity, which takes into consideration people with different neurological syndromes such as autistic disorder and Tourette syndrome that can be part of theater audiences. It is close to impossible for people with autistic disorder or Tourette syndrome to sit still for long periods or move around and act quietly, so they may be constantly making small nervous move-

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

ments or sometimes speak out in loud voices. They can't control these behaviors by themselves. So, they can't go to regular theater performances. However, can go to a "relaxed performance" because measures such as providing areas of slightly brighter lighting near exits to allow them to leave the theater space when necessary. We also provide a variety of different types of seat, mats, sofas and cushions. These are especially beneficial for audience members with chronic pain symptoms. The expense of providing these simple types of measures is very small. However, to hold relaxed performances it is important that the fact that they are such must be thoroughly announced and understood by general audience.

Even though these barrier-free measures may not be so expensive, is there still some form of financial support available for them?

In the case of the audio description service, it only costs about 250 euro per performance to offer, so we don't seek financial support for this program.

That must be possible because everyone on your staff understands the meaning and importance of what they are doing, isn't it?

Exactly. For example, as I said we print details about our barrier-free facilities and services in the TANZTAGE pamphlet, and that was an idea that came from our publicity department. It wasn't something that I told them to do. And, our production department has organized many performances by artists with disabilities over the past two years. They have learned a lot from the work of organizing tours of those productions by artists with disabilities and inviting performances by artists with disabilities to our festivals, and it has become working knowledge for them now. They now know things like how to prepare assistance for disabled artists' flights for touring or coming to Berlin from outside the country and what kinds of hotel rooms they need.

It is true that all members of the team have to achieve a certain skill level, but there is no need to hire additional staff for this work. It is enough if all of them can think and act together. At other theaters they will tell you things like, "The publicity department is in charge of that," or, "Please contact the theater education department regarding that." But I believe that is the wrong way to do things.

Could you tell us in some detail what kind of coaching you give your staff?

Coaching is a process that should be started from the very beginning. We employ two types of coaching. One is done at the team level, especially the teams involved in creative, or artistic work, such as the publicity and the production department staff. The first half of the coaching program involved speech, the delicacies of verbal expression, especially awareness training aimed at getting our staff to recognize and avoid wording that is based in prejudices or stereotypes. In the second half, we talk together about what we can do within our theater. One of the first ideas that came out of those discussions was the early boarding service. We set to work on that immediately, and within a week we had the system in place. Our team at the Sophiensaele is small, and they are resourceful and fast-working.

The second stage of coaching is for the staff that actually works in close contact with the audiences. In order to ensure that they can learn all the things they want and need to know we held this coaching in an atmosphere where all of them felt free to

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

ask any questions they had. They had worries about how they should interact with audience member with disabilities at the ticket counter, when entering the theater or at the lobby bar. So, it was coaching that provided an opportunity for them to ask about anything they didn't understand or wanted to know about.

What kind of person served as the coach in this training?

In that case, it was a culture and arts professional who was also disabled. Today we know a variety of different coaches, but when coaching about the disabled, it is important that the coaches themselves be people with disabilities.

Are there any other points that you are careful about in your support of artists with disabilities?

With deaf people [or the hard of hearing], we are careful to consider their community. In Germany, the deaf use their own distinct German-based sign language system, so we are careful to deal with them as a cultural minority [with special needs]. Because there are very few non-deaf people who can use this unique German sign language, as a community they have little contact with non-deaf population at large. So, when we want to make a proposal or provide some form of service or activity for the deaf community, the most important thing is that we consult with representatives of the community first. If you don't do that, there is a very good chance that you will make a proposal that is completely off course from the things they actually need.

When we had a meeting with deaf [or aurally challenged] performers that we know, I asked them what we could do to get more deaf people [or aurally challenged] to participate in our theater's programs. After that, we made a contract with one of them to provide us with advice on a regular basis.

Was that for the purpose of getting more deaf people to come to the theater as audience?

Primarily it was for audience. In Berlin, The deaf community has a high level of political consciousness, and when we interviewed them, they said that when they went to productions of existing plays there would just be a sign-language interpreter off to the side translating it, and that is something they are not interested in at all. Not only was it not interesting but they even felt it looked ridiculous. We heard the opinion that what they were really interested in seeing is performances of plays that are original bilingual works jointly created by deaf and non-deaf creators/performers working together. Just before Christmas in 2019, we presented performance of our first work created along these lines. It was the joint creation of four deaf female performers. It was the first work ever in Berlin to be directed by deaf performers. Before that there had been a group that created bilingual (verbal and sign language) works, but the director in charge of the artistic presentation was not deaf. But our theater's production created and performed solely by deaf performers turned out to be a wonderful experience both for the performers themselves and for us. The work they chose to create took the form of a musical. Many people think that deaf people have no way of connecting to music, but that is not true at all. In that sense, it turned out to be a very experimental work.

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

Sounds interesting.

The good thing about my position at the Sophiensaele is that I can always try creating new experimental projects of a pioneering nature.

You certainly have launched new projects of a pioneering nature one after another. Aren't your projects like this having an influence not only in Berlin but throughout Germany?

Yes. In the barrier-free field, our theater was the first to adopt a comprehensive program. Now there are a growing number of theaters adopting similar programs, and we are getting inquiries from them. Now we have established a new network named "Aesthetics of Access." The network now includes both public theaters and "free-scene" theaters (presenting independent artists and companies) and we get together to discuss the barrier-free theme.

Would you tell us what are some of the things you have gained or come to realize from working with artists with disabilities?

Along with my work at the Sophiensaele, I was also working on the Tanzhaus NRW in Dusseldorf. There I planned a one-week Lab for artists with disabilities. The theme of the Lab was "The influence that the daily life experience of people with disabilities have on their artistic creation." Of course, the disabilities of each artist are completely different, but we found that there are also things that they have in common. One of the participating artists was Claire Cunningham. She is a person who uses crutches in her daily life and in her creations. Her dance compositions explore the relationship between her body and her crutches. Her use of crutches gives her a unique view of the world. And, she doesn't just use her crutches to move around, she is also perceiving the world through her crutches. This is an important theme that is worthy of research, and one that we studied in depth through our questions to the artists with disabilities. What is the unique sensitivity it brings? How in particular are the means of consciousness different as a result? And finally, what artistic decisions do the daily life experiences lead to?

There was also a choreographer from Sweden named Sindri Runudde. He has a heavy visual disability. In daily life, he has to use senses other than the visual sense to verify his position in his living spaces. As a result, those senses are very highly developed in the task of identifying his position in spaces. And that sensitivity is exactly what students of dance spend a long time in learning. In contrast, that sensitivity is a necessity of daily life for Sindri, and since he has no other means of sensing his position in spaces, he has acquired that sensibility and it is always in use for him, which said in another way means he can never turn it off. In daily life and on stage, that sensitivity is always at work. Whereas in the case of dancers with normal sight, they need that sensitivity on stage but can turn it off whenever they leave the stage.

Toward Theaterformen 2021

Finally, we would like to ask you about the international performing arts festival Theaterformen that you will be artistic director of from next season. How did you come to

Presenter Interview

Anna Mueller's Approach to Spreading
Understanding of Dance and Theater

ダンスや劇場の考え方を広げる
アンナ・ミュルターのアプローチ

be given this post and what are your ideas for it?

The festival has a rule that an artistic director can only serve for two terms (a total of six years). That limit cannot be extended, so this will be the last year for the current artistic director, Martine Dennewal. The selection process for the next artistic director began at the beginning of 2019 and the application process got underway. The festival is held alternately in Hannover and Brunswick each year. I am from Hannover originally, so I always went to see the festival, so I feel that it was an important part of my formative years and upbringing with regards to the arts. I believe it is one of the most outstanding international performing arts festivals. I greatly admire what the current artistic director has achieved there. She placed emphasis on both innovative work and artistic quality, and she had a high level of political awareness. I plan to continue in these directions going forward. Also, I will certainly take new measures for this festival in the areas of barrier-free and disabilities that I have been talking about. I will program lots of works by artists with disabilities and I plan to offer a variety of services and programs for audience with disabilities.

At Theaterformen, the execution of the budget and the programming are separate operations, and it is part of the Niedersachsen State Theater Hannover, where many of the performances are held. Seeing that the festival is held there in Hannover every other year, it doesn't make much sense to make only the festival barrier-free. The State Theater's General Artistic Director, Sonja Anders, is very positive about introducing barrier-free, so I want to work to gradually introduce a barrier-free environment not only for the festival but full-time at the theater as well. However, a State Theater like this is a huge institution employing several hundred people full-time. It will be a big challenge for me to try to create the same type of staff solidarity there as we have with our staff of just 20 at Sophiensaele.

Also, I want to expand things out of the theater and program large-scale audience-participation type events in public spaces around the city. I also plan to introduce a new theme of "Climate Justice" for the festival. I want to position it to deal not only with environmental issues but also economic, social and political issues.

There are people engaged in some very interesting activities in Hannover. They call themselves "City Makers" and what they do is to go into urban spaces and undertake projects aimed at rethinking city planning. There are numerous citizen groups like this in Hannover and they are connected in a network. Among them is a very creative group named Endbus and I plan to work with them to realize some type of audience-participation project like I mentioned earlier. Although I grew up in Hannover, I want to learn anew about the city today, what is happening there, and find places and unique aspects and think about how they can be connected to the festival.

We will be looking forward to the results of your curation for next year's Theaterformen. Thank you so much for your time with us today.