

Dance in Our Genes

The Slovak nation has dance in its genes. The bodies of our ancestors were formed by hard physical work, Slovak nature as well as customs, traditions and folk art. Deep valleys separated regions or villages, which caused every region to have its own, original character of folk art. It is seen in architecture, dialects, traditions, customs, folk attire, music, songs and dances. Folk dance is an important part of our culture and Slovaks are truly proud of it. Traditions and related dances and customs, authentically maintained in communities, motivated many future dance professionals when choosing their occupation. In this aspect, it is not surprising that the first dance experience in CVs of many successful Slovak dancers is their dancing in some folk group. No, you do not have to fear that there are productions of our folk art dance ensembles in the selection for the participants of the IETM Bratislava Meeting. Nevertheless, there are certain folk elements which are certainly to be found in the shaping of movement and in the physical expression of dancers whom we will introduce to you.

The selection of dance productions is quite broad. It brings modern ballet, physical theatre and different forms of contemporary dance - we believe that this sample eloquently maps today's situation of dance in Slovakia. Apart from the quality of the productions, it was important for us to introduce all the dance groups or choreographers who have been forming and influencing dance in Slovakia.

Therefore, the selection consists of two established and systemically state-funded ensembles. The first is the Ballet of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava which in the past two years, led by dancer and choreographer Mário Radačovský, set out on a reforming journey and among classical ballet it offers also modern versions of ballet and dance productions. The second such ensemble, though much smaller as far as its structure and scope, is the Studio of Dance in Banská Bystrica which has existed since 1998, led by Zuzana Hájková, and is the first professional dance theatre in Slovakia presenting contemporary dance. It is important also for its contribution in the form of providing space for producing local work. During its existence it has produced as many as twenty full-length productions.

Another group from the selected artistic programme consists of representatives of the independent scene, or rather, non-state culture. In other words, production teams or artistic groups who develop their work without the systematic support or backing by any institution, and in order to obtain finances for their projects, they have to apply for money from the grant system of the Ministry of Culture or other grant systems. They present their work in various theatres as well as non-theatre spaces. Their work is innovative; they are keen to experiment, searching for new forms of expression; they are often a part of broader artistic communities where they meet with artists of different artistic genres who participate in the production of their projects. Such groups in our selection are the Debris Company and Artyci, Petra Fornayová or Jaro Viňarský. Viňarský may be placed also into the third group of our sample - the group of Slovaks working abroad.

Now we can symbolically return to the beginning of this article, because one of the traditions of Slovaks has always been their leaving the country in order to find jobs abroad. In the distant as well as near past, it has been caused by various reasons. At

one time it was because of an economic crisis, another time because of political oppression. Slovaks move abroad also today, despite the fact that the political context as well as their reasons have changed. Shortly after 1989, when the borders were opened and it was possible to move freely within Europe, a large group of young talented dancers, educated in Slovakia, moved abroad to find better conditions for their artistic growth. It happened because of the insufficient institutional support for contemporary dance as well as the fact that this genre is still being considered as minor, thus depending on the good favour of grant committees, which means constant financial uncertainty for dance artists. Despite this situation there is one gratifying fact – those who left have not lost their love for Slovakia: they visit Slovakia personally or through their work. And this is the main reason why they cannot be omitted in our selection. In addition to the above-mentioned Jaro Viňarský, who lives and works in nearby Prague, we present a strong group of personalities – dancers working in Brussels known in the world as Les SlovaKs, the former Ultima Vez member, Jozef Fruček, as well as choreographer and dancer Peter Mika who was for some years a member of the SOAP Company and now lives with his partner Olga Cobos in Spain and Germany.

We are happy that thanks to the IETM meeting we have the opportunity in this concentrated way to present and confront the work and creation of a broad scale of Slovak choreographers and dancers. We think it is an exceptional opportunity that the work of the artists will be introduced not only to the participants of the meeting but also to the admirers of dance and people interested in cultural events. We believe that all that is on the programme will convince you that our opening statement is true: the Slovak nation has dancing in its genes!

Mira Kovářová, a member of the organization committee and the team of selectors of the IETM Bratislava 2009 artistic programme