

FINAL REPORT
ON
MY INTERNSHIP
ERASMUS+ MOBILITY
AT

CLUB GUY AND RONI'S POETIC DISASTER CLUB

INTRODUCTION

Poetic Disasters Club (PDC) is a junior company of Club Guy and Roni, a dance company based in Groningen, Netherlands. I have found out about the company through a connection to Španski Borci, a contemporary dance theatre in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 2015. At that time Club Guy and Roni did a coproduction with the house ensemble called Phobia. I was inspired by their impact and continued following their work on social media and contacted them in my third year of studies at Budapest Contemporary Dance Company.

The process of acquiring the traineeship position began with an audition in February, 2019. Only at the stop did I find out that we are actually auditioning for two positions: Mini and Maxi PDC. Due to programming of the upcoming season they had a need for two different groups of trainees, a smaller one to fulfil several smaller artistic projects and a big one to dance in their upcoming mega production Before/After. I did not



proceed to the second round of auditions to qualify for Mini PDC, however I did, to my extreme surprise and happiness, receive a letter I had been accepted to Maxi PDC.

At first it was going to be a 7-month long programme with creation of two performances, however later they informed us that the schedule has been shortened to a 5-month full-time programme, consisting out of two periods: creation period and touring period of Before/After.

Due to the establishment of the Covid-19 pandemic state, the touring period had to be cancelled and the activities of the theatre moved online into a project called NITE Hotel, which is a digital theatre and social place.

Creation period was consistent with daily technical classes and rehearsals for the performance Before/After.

During the pandemic we continued with online classes and smaller creative tasks, as well as being involved in the events happening at NITE Hotel, including the worldwide premiere of Before/After.

The tasks of each trainee were to follow the programme and proposed activities with full commitment. The attendance of morning classes, meetings and rehearsals was compulsory. As well as having a professional attitude towards preparedness towards rehearsals and a communicative spirit towards the team.

CREATION PERIOD OF BEFORE/AFTER

Our typical day started at 10 AM with a **warm-up class**. Normally I would arrive to the theatre half an hour before to do my own warm-up and mentally prepare for the long day. The class was primarily given for the interns by the members of the company. Each class was very different from another, which was wonderful as it provided us with a wide range of new skills and input:

Sofiko	<i>classical ballet class</i>	<i>emphasis on precision, quietness, discipline</i>
Adam	<i>contemporary ballet</i>	<i>emphasis on speed, memory comprehension, discovery, integration</i>
Igor	<i>contemporary class</i>	<i>emphasis on floorwork, strength, spirals, momentum, explosivity, exploration, flow</i>
Angela	<i>contemporary class</i>	<i>emphasis on precision, going back to the basics, execution, simplicity, joy, exploration, travelling</i>
Camillo	<i>contemporary class</i>	<i>emphasis on strength, anatomical precision, travelling, transition of weight</i>
Harold	<i>urban class</i>	<i>emphasis on perspiration, speed, precision, joy, swag, spatial orientation, mobility</i>

The warm-up class lasted for 75 min after which we had 15 min break to prepare for the rehearsals. The rehearsals started at 11.30. The daily rehearsal schedule would normally consist of three periods:

- 11.30 - 13.00,
- 13.45 - 15.45
- 16.00 - 18.00.

The exact time frames would certainly vary, but mostly they always made sure we stick to the timeline as much as possible to ensure we have proper lunch, at least one additional break and finish on time.

Since we were using our voice in the performance, we usually started the rehearsals with a **voice warm-up**, given either by our composer **Luke Deane** or one of the actors. That was a very functional way to tune in together as a group and recenter the body after the vigorous class. The voice warm-up normally consisted from basic onomatopoeic singing exercises to more complex exercises, including learning how to sing specific melodies that we would later on use in the performance.

In the beginning of the creation process we would work with Luke for the entirety of the first rehearsal period. The interesting thing about those rehearsals was primarily the



feeling of discovery and novelty in his approach. Apart from learning set material, he made us experiment with nearly everything. He was thoroughly a great teacher. As few people had prior musical or singing experience, he did a great job in inspiring comfort and a sense of confidence in the group. The purpose of those musical rehearsals was for Luke to test his ideas and prepare material for common rehearsals with the whole crew, as well as to educate and prepare us to perform with our voice.

First few weeks of creation we worked with **Roni Haver** for the rest of the day on preparing the movement material. Roni is a very peculiar choreographer to work with and I must say I very much like her manner of guiding a choreographing process.

We were a big group and most of the material we were working on in the beginning was including the entire group. She came prepared with visual references in form of photographs and videos to give us an idea of what sort of material she would like to build. Regardless the fact that the initial idea seemed pretty vague, she was able to guide the



process with giving very simple and precise instructions. She was shaping the material through an active approach, which would practically mean that we would be in a process of a guided improvisation and she would be adding instructions as we kept on going.

I soon realised what she expects of me as a dancer in a way of attitude. It is very important to stay clear and to allow her to guide, while staying fully active. It is important to not interrupt the process too much and be aware that there will always be room for discussion later, but to rather dive into the process with trust. I was consciously putting myself in a state of reliability and flexibility. Every instruction that we got was important to

remember as it was difficult to anticipate when would we need to recall it again. I had trouble figuring out the nuances of what she prefers as a movement material at the start. However once I started to understand and see her movement language better, that became easier and I felt more confident to make propositions and be more active in the process.

Working in such a big group definitely meant that we each needed to be more self-reliant. It was already a big work trying to coordinate us all together towards making comprehensive movement material, it would have been hardly possible to keep giving each individual feedback on their work. That was a considerably new experience for me, even though I had worked in larger groups before, most my professional work was done in smaller groups with a close watch of the choreographer.



Consequently I started to feel way more responsibility to measure myself up and keep myself in line. That was a very positive and growing experience, which has taught me to trust myself, my knowledge and my intuition more.



After a few weeks working more intensively with Roni and Luke, we have created a number of raw movement materials and became ready to start common rehearsals with the actors. There were eight actors playing in the performance, three of which were dancers from Club Guy and Roni, who were also creating movement material but for the sake of clarity were still labelled actors with the rest.

Apart from them, the regular

crew during rehearsals consisted of stage designers, music composers, two assistants to the director and the director **Guy Weizman**.

As Roni kept a close focus on creating movement material, Guy was handling the script and creating the performance as a whole. I was impressed by the smoothness of their directorial duet, while certainly at times they had to swallow each others words and deeds, they are by far one of the most efficient theatre makers that I have experienced or heard about. That being said, it is difficult to imagine the complexity of the work they were doing each day while on top of that staying incredibly, kind, humble and human.

From then on the work became very intense and at times chaotic as we were trying to figure out several things at once: how to stage the scenes, how to deal with the script, how to deal with moving scenography, how should the scenes be filmed, how to fit our movement material into anything, etc. But It was a wonderful mess I highly enjoyed.



We were working with two big projection screens in front of the stage with an idea that each scene is being simultaneously filmed and a big part of what is happening on stage is a fluid creation of a cinematic story told by the main character who is telling all these stories. The role of us dancers was to be a glue that ties everything together, from visuals, to moving scenography, to creating spaces and atmosphere. The role that was emphasised especially later in the process once we started working with costumes.

The scenography consisted of:

- big moving panels which were able to function as rooms or other types of barriers,
- pieces of movable furniture like a shower, a bath, a toilet, a table, a carpet,
- plenty of small plants,
- small objects like a phone, books, jewellery.

All of the pieces of scenography were subject to constant motion and change. There were three main spaces existing on stage:

- the main space, where we constructed scenes,
- the hotel room, which was front stage, where the main character (storyteller) existed and was isolated with a clear barrier from the main space,
- the cinematic space, aka the two big panels that presented the spaces captured through the camera.

After another few weeks of working with actors only, we were joined by musicians. The ordinary chaos took its most chaotic form yet as we tried to incorporate the live music with seven very alive musicians who were also another very alive part of the stage into a still very fragile structure we created so far.

However soon the performance started to take more and more shape with delicate and slow combing of each scene. The rehearsals were intense in concentration and intense in waiting and general anticipation, but the only way to set this big machine right was through slow, hyper detailed and careful direction.



It was extremely helpful that we could develop and rehearse in a space that was the same size as the SPOT theatre, the Municipal Theatre of Groningen where we were going to premiere the performance. That made the transition to the stage way seamless than I was formerly used to.

We spent the last week rehearsing in the theatre. That was a very existing time because one could finally see everything coming together, we had mornings off and worked long towards the night and we were filled by the pre-premiere anticipation.

The news about the lockdown came on the day when we were supposed to have our first public try-out. At first I found it difficult to comprehend what is going to happen. Naturally it would seem logical that we will have to cancel our premiere however at that point that seemed very difficult to imagine after all the work we have been pouring into making the performance happen.



After a while the director of the theatre gathered us and made it official that all public events are postponed until further notice. Additionally they made a decision to make a full technical registration of the piece with photographs and videos and on top of that, to have a private premiere/performance which would be thoroughly recorded. As we were already such a big crew, we could only host very selected few for the premiere. Yet it remained to be a lovely occasion and the closest we ended up coming to an actual performance.

VIRTUAL THEATRE AND PREMIERE OF BEFORE/AFTER

Since this concept has been a predominant part of the better second half of my internship, I had plenty of time and reason to reckon and dwell my thoughts on it. Not only has Club Guy and Roni and NNT created a virtual theatre called 'NITE Hotel' but they have also decided to premiere their new performance Before/After on that platform. A decision which, to my understanding, was to an extent obligatory, as to fulfil the expectation of theatre management and responsibility towards the public. Certainly it might have been influenced by the fact that the performance had a high-quality video and audio footage, therefore it could do better justice to the original (stage) performance as intended. Consequently, by creating a digital version, the video editors became dramaturges who, while sticking to the original timeline of the piece, had to make decisions what exactly to show for how long. That inevitably created a direct narrative for the spectator, which is in my opinion the biggest cost paid.



Before/After is an extraordinary complex world created on stage with 38 performers who share the stage without a pause for two hours. Each particle has a narrative parallel to all others and while not always in highlight, each is always important. I believe giving this abundance of freedom to the spectator to choose among several sights at any given moment is the very core and perhaps even intended privilege that this performance has to offer.

Moreover, I would like to share my opinion on this concept in general. At one of the Friday NITE events, Guy said that digital theatre is the future of the theatre. That statement did make me somehow stutter and feel irritated, which inspired me to think about this matter further. Because Guy does have a point. The fact is that the only way to keep some form of theatre alive in the present situation would be through digitalisation of it for the greater part. Besides “future” does hardly mean “going back to normal”. It is impossible to anticipate in which state the world will be after a certain normalisation of public gatherings and events, what even to estimate how long will it take until we can say peace with the pandemic.



Yet it is important for me to be critical of the course theatre art is taking, as I am becoming more and more a part of this world.

First of all, I believe it is impossible and undesirable to perform a theatre performance online. To stream a performance online does not represent a sustainable way to keep our profession alive. The theatre art, as I perceive it and work for, is based on the

empathy of the audience towards the artist's action and the sharing of the same physical space between the audience and artists. I denounce the attempt to force the theatre art to fall into the void of internet streaming. This for me represents an attempt to reject problems of live performance in relation to the pandemic state. While I am contemplating alternatives it is clear to me that it is impossible to defend an art form by proposing to change the core of that art form.

As much as there is immense power in the way Club Guy and Roni and many other theatres adapted and improvised in the otherwise rather devastating situation, I would consider it an emergency solution rather than a long-term path.

For me the premiere was bitter sweet. I was glad to share the work we have done with more people that it would have been possible at an analog theatre premiere. The accessibility is undoubtedly a big reason why online streaming does deserve credit, especially under the pressure of current situation. However watching the performance digitally left a lot to be desired, both from point of a spectator and obviously from the point of view of a performer.

TOUR PERIOD/CORONA PERIOD

Personally, the period after the abrupt halt of the work, was full of ups and downs. At first I could use the rest and I enjoyed the space to catch up with myself and prepare even better for the eventual premiere. At that time we still received only temporary measures and there was a considerable chance and indication that we might still be able to start the tour. Officially we were told to be on stand-by, keep healthy, home and fit.

However it became clear two weeks later that the lock down will last until 1st of June the least, which meant a cancellation of our entire tour and a suspension of all rehearsals and activities until then. All of the action moved online, with most of the company's resources directed towards the creation of the online theatre NITE Hotel. The new mode took some time to understand and form. We were receiving weekly updates from the director of our theatre as well as had regular "catch-up" meetings with Roni and our supervisor Tatiana. We started doing three online dance classes per week, given by Angela and Harold. Later on, the third class became an acting class given by the company's wonderful actress Veerle Van Overloop. It felt good to do an acting class and acquire new skills. We primarily focused on how to work with a given text.

Personally, I focused on continuing individual training, as much as that was possible from home with a limited space and inconvenient setting.

PERSONAL GAIN AND FUTURE

I spent a lot of time thinking about what is there to add on terms of personal gain. I guess the answer is to really look closer to where I am coming from and where am I going, and how has all this experience personally affected me.

First of all, I realised am completing this internship with a slight feeling of being unfulfilled and disappointed. It has been a rising emotion over the past couple of weeks approaching the official end of the internship and it took me closer introspection to realise what it is about and address it. I had a long time to prepare and build expectation of this internship. The audition happened almost a year before the actual internship really began, therefore the readjustment of the programme due to the pandemic hit me quite hard. In a way it took a way the part of the internship I was most excited about. It also made me realise how fragile my sense of purpose is and how easy it is to feel lost while having your life dictated by a situation you have very little control over. You do however have control how you decide to handle it yourself.

Another part of the disappointment however was moreover directed towards the form of this year PDC programme. As I have been following their work for many years I had a pretty fixed idea about what their junior company is about. Each year the PDC would do all these wonderful highly creative projects where they could develop their artistic vision, performative skillset under caring supervision of the ensemble. This idea was the initial reason why I wanted to be a part of it, as I have a deep yearning for developing my own sense of creation rather than following someone else's.

As soon as I found out about this year's programme it became quite clear to me that my experience will be different and I was prepared for that. However I am regretful that they didn't use the time of the pandemic to give us more creative tools and input to do,

instead of simply providing classes and other smaller tasks. I think this would be a great opportunity to fulfil the internship with more exploration and creativeness.

I did gain tremendously from this experience, and I believe I wouldn't have gained all of the following if the experience would not have been exactly as it was. Working in such a big group thought me even more about letting go of my ego and finding higher purpose as a part of a much bigger puzzle. In a way, such role is even more challenging than to be a soloist. **It is easy to be a soloist.** I have realised that I do not want to be a part of a company yet. I am not developed as a dancer enough yet in a way of versatility. There are things I do very well and I know that if I landed in a company right now I would only end up using the things I do very well and not as much developing the things I don't do as well just yet.

I have realised this through working closely with all these amazing dancers from the company. And I realised that some of them do the same thing all over in every show. And it is great and it works and it is amazing, but it is not enough for me to be an artist like that. On another hand I was amazed getting to know other dancers who are incredibly versatile and can do anything from singing to acting to all kinds of dance parts. That is how I want to be. And the way to get there is to ruthlessly continue with my training and independent work whereas it is easier to be flexible and work on new things.

I also realised that I will never be completely fulfilled if I am not an **active part** of the choreographing process. I have way too much opinion and solutions to just follow. It even has a negative effect on me, in a way of starting to be creatively paralysed, when I am deprived of having active say in what I do on stage.

I have learnt that **you cannot rely on anybody to seize what you want.** I have found new strength and independence to me, that goes beyond my momentary occupation or belonging. So in that way I am very grateful that they did not give us much things to be



occupied by, as out of that rose my boredom and frustration, and out of that rose my new power to continue with my own work which I have started already at BCDA but let go a bit during the past year.

What the future holds for me is a lot of free-lance dancing for which I am grateful that I have been found by people who want to work with me. I have my first independent

project premiering in September. Apart from that I want to focus on developing Playground dance (my thesis work), finding residencies and choreographing opportunities to develop the method. Most of all, the pandemic thought me how to take time and how to fill time and how to slow down. I haven't slowed down for years. I consider it partly and

occupational hazard as well as a character flaw, but I am doing my best to tackle it. I rather do less and do that well and with maximum attention. I am also realising that BCDA has given me more core than I thought. **Everything takes time**, I often forget that.

VIDEO MATERIAL

moments from the rehearsals:





trailer of Before/After: <https://vimeo.com/407960303>
digital theatre: <https://nitehotel.nl>