

Presentation for: 'The Small Voice'

36th World Dance Congress 2013 St. Petersburg. Russia

My name is Anna Barclay de Tolly Dwyer. I am honoured and humbled to be here in St Petersburg at The 36th World Dance Congress.

'The Small Voice' is about the fight between industry and nature. The beauty of birdsong and the importance of trying to keep hold of nature when man's pursuit of technology often masks the smallest of voices and sanctuaries in a modern world become increasingly hard to find.

Show film: 3 mins 30 secs

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY0NRCthMIQ>

This project was of my own making. I composed the music, wrote the lyrics, directed and produced it; the rest of the project was founded on goodwill. My background is one of the arts, but I am not a classically trained musician.

Stravinsky said: ***I haven't understood a bar of music in my life, but I have felt it***

I believe that each and every one of us has something important to say and contribute to society. The journey in making 'The Small Voice' was born from this.

'A voice cannot carry the tongue and the lips that gave it wings. Alone must it seek the ether and alone and without his nest shall the eagle fly across the sun' Kahil Gibran

My inspiration behind the film was my journey walking to and from work. Every day I passed through busy roads and heavy traffic, people on their mobile phones, aeroplanes overhead, the repetition of constant drilling; The hive of industry and a reflection of modern day life. In the middle of this walk was a park and the sharp contrast between the two struck me. How beautiful and peaceful the park was in comparison to the noise outside it. The tranquillity of birdsong, the lakes and the rising and setting of the sun. How I wanted to stay there.

'We are always longing for visions of beauty. We are always dreaming of unknown worlds.' Maxim Gorky

It was an oasis amidst the chaos that surrounded it. As I started to leave the park the birdsong became fainter and the sound of people on their mobile phones more prevalent. Technology had already started to encroach on 'the sanctuary' until the sound of the birds was extinguished and replaced by car horns and traffic. I thought about this and wondered if in our search for advancement we were actually moving backwards and destroying the very things that give us peace and foresight.

As Karl Marx said:

'The development of industry and civilization in general has always shown itself so active in the destruction of forests that everything that has been done for their conservation and production is completely insignificant in comparison.'

In 'The Small Voice' I wanted to portray not only this contrast but in using one dancer; the fight that man has within himself to find a sanctuary.

'Spirituality is not to be learned by flight from the world, or by running away from things, or by turning solitary and going apart from the world. Rather, we must learn an inner solitude wherever or with whomsoever we may be. We must learn to penetrate things and find God there.'

Meister Eckhart

I had seen a wonderful solo audition piece by Irlan Santos da Silva from the film 'Only When I Dance' based on the life of Nijinsky set to Shostakovich's Symphony No. 11. Opus.103: II (The Ninth of January. Allegro.) He portrayed the sanity and insanity of Nijinsky within his dance piece. I thought it would make for a strong visual effect having one dancer playing the part of industry and nature. I wanted the film to be in silhouette and set against a white background as I thought this would be more evocative. I had originally thought the piece would be in animation or shadow puppetry. This would mean that the focus was just on the dancer. Silhouette seemed a good balance between real and surreal.

On a practical level there were financial restraints at the time of the filming, I had no surplus cash or funding from the government. This meant I had to rely on goodwill and keep costs to an absolute minimum. In total the film was made for £174 which is approximately P8,959 Roubles.

I should like explain more about the serendipity and goodwill of the process leading up to the film, to which without both there would be no film.

'As Cicero put it: ***If you should take the bond of goodwill out of the universe, no house or city could stand.***'

I had already composed a rough score for 'The Small Voice' under the careful guidance of my tutor and mentor Will Dutta but was unsure of which direction to take the piece. I was then invited to take part in The Wing Assignment which was founded by Nina Farrell and Asa Medhurst. This was a pilot exhibition and invited artists from all genres using different mediums to interpret what their vision of wings and flight meant to them. I submitted this score and to my delight I was selected to be one of the exhibitors.

This piece was always meant to be a film. I had the idea of how I wanted the film to look but I had no narrator, no budget, no venue, no film maker and most importantly no dancer nor choreographer. The exhibition was to open in a few weeks and I had to work fast if this was going to be achieved.

I managed to source almost everybody involved in the film, from the building I work in: the actor, the film-maker and co-director, the dancer and choreographer and the theatrical venue...for example:

My boss had suggested I contact Petrus Bertchinger as he might be able to help me find a space. I knew Petrus, but only as one of the clients who would come for a meeting and go out for a cigarette. We would have little chats about life, I knew nothing of his provenance except that he had worked as a stage manager and had a technical background in theatre. I called him and said that we needed a space to film 'The Small Voice', and that all we required was a room and a white wall, lights would be a bonus. He called me back to say that he had found a space for us. It transpired that it was the main theatre at The Unicorn. We had a three hour window to use it. I found out later that he had been the head technical director! We had lighting thrown in as well.

I had to focus on 'polishing' the score up to a good standard and record the narration. I contacted the music studio where I used to work and to my delight they offered to help.

We rerecorded the track using the Vienna Philharmonic package and added the narration.

I then had a call from one of the girls in the production company to say that she had found a dancer and choreographer.

I had my first meeting with Reece at Starbucks in Westfield, where he was doing double shifts at a clothes shop, in between studying Musical Theatre at The London Studios. I instantly liked him, I was impressed not only by his work ethic, but by his courtesy and can do attitude, he also fitted the brief perfectly physically.

I had seen a clip of his on YouTube and it had mechanical elements, which would suit the industry side of the dance perfectly. I explained to him the vision I had for 'The Small Voice': one character playing both the part of industry and nature; I gave him a recording of 'The Small Voice' track and the piece I had mentioned in 'Only When I Dance'.

We arranged to meet over the next couple of days for a rehearsal before the film. Because of the limited time and other work commitments we only had a chance for one rehearsal before the filming. We met at the Battersea Arts Centre, and chose a corner of the foyer, where there was a mirror so that we could rehearse without too many interruptions. Because we weren't in a room and didn't have a stereo system, Reece had to dance to the music from my phone on loudspeaker; thankfully he seemed unfazed by this and danced as if there was an orchestra within his heart and soul. A kind member of the staff at the Arts Centre saw Reece dancing and offered us a studio space to rehearse in for free, this was yet another sign of goodwill and generosity. Even though we only had one rehearsal, Reece had got and choreographed the very essence of the piece, what a gift he was.

My architect friend Thomas had kindly offered to film this for free, only charging for the photographic paper. We had often spoken about working together and this seemed the perfect opportunity.

Now... to the day of filming... Thomas, Reece, and I, were met by Petrus at the theatre. He took us to the main auditorium where we laid down the white photographic paper onto the floor; we needed to do this in order to create the black and white contrast and silhouette effect.

Thomas got the camera into position and Reece started warming up. The music started playing, the camera started rolling and Reece began to dance, it was so exciting; looking through the camera, we could begin to see how the film might be.

We knew we only had three hours in which to achieve what we wanted or to do the best we could. We stopped Reece a couple of times to give directions, and to try new positions but all in all he only did FIVE takes. In each and every take he gave 100% and it was at the fifth one that we said 'make this your last one'. We could see he was getting tired, as he had given so much already. The fifth and final take was the take we used. It was the best and unedited, apart from the enhancement of the silhouette shape, the dance was exactly as Reece had danced and choreographed it. We were so happy.

We left the theatre, thanking the whole team and went and had a celebratory lunch!

On the way home on the train, I marvelled at the people I had worked with and the huge blessing that they had been.

'The Small Voice' showed at The Red Bull Studios. It was very warmly received and went on to show at several prestigious venues in London, including the Chelsea Arts Club.

We even received a tweet from Sarah Crompton, the Arts Editor and Chief and dance critic at The Daily Telegraph. (One of the largest newspapers in England) saying that she' ***really liked it alot and couldn't wait to see the next one'***.

So what next?

I had the opportunity to do a workshop with choreographer and dancer Kiril Burlov of the Rambert Dance Co, Veronica Mauro and the eminent cellist Peter Gregson. This was a fascinating and interesting workshop and further fuelled my passion for dance and the arts.

Where do people like me go next?

At the moment my day job is funding my love and I am relying on the goodwill of fellow creative souls but is this a particularly fair or perfect solution, as I will always want to continue doing what I love.

As Stravinsky put it:

"Since I myself was created I cannot help having the desire to create."

There are learning and public programs at the English National Ballet and Trinity Laban but these are on a large scale. The Gallery Sector has Learning and Participation programs across the spectrum.

If people like me had assistance on small projects like mine from professional arts practitioners, I wonder what could be achieved:

Sergei Bubka said:

'Method is very important as is a high-quality specialist working with you to keep you going in the right direction for your improvement and to help create results.'

If the dance world were to explore its own position within the wider community surely this would not only provide a feedback loop whereby these 'community creatives' were generating an audience but it would also mean that the broader voice of all people was being heard.

As W.H. Auden said: ***'All I have is a voice'***