

Georgia Petrali

“I believe in three things! Daring, Talent, Luck”

The prolific choreographer, Georgia Petrali, who founded the Fysalida Dance Company, opens up her heart to us in an entertaining interview...

How did dance become a part of your life? When did it first make that 'click' in your mind?

When I was young, I was constantly moving and dancing... no matter whether I was watching ballet on TV or rhythmic gymnastics or ice-skating all of which brought me the same joy... my mother didn't know what to do with me so she entrusted me to the daughter of a friend of hers and she in turn enrolled me in a dance school.

Your career to date indicates that you're a great fan of contemporary dance. Does that allow you more freedom as a dancer?

I love and appreciate contemporary dance just as much as classical dance! I believe in technique and in the right body posture through any form of movement or expression, dance, theatre, or martial arts. A properly trained body can acclimatise itself to various types of movement. Of course I feel more independence with contemporary dance because it has been my type of 'dance' of recent years, but that doesn't mean that I don't appreciate other forms of dance and art, or know their techniques. Generally speaking, I don't like the use of labels and names in art. I consider that the real substance of the thing is lost in that way.

Does the discipline and severity of classical dance have a role in contemporary dance?

Of course they do! When those elements are not to be found to the same degree -depending on the case of course- their absence is clear in the end result. And their absence also indicates that the outcome will be somehow 'miserable'. And art and misery, miserableness do not mix. When something brings us joy and we opt to 'study' it and to 'practice' it, we ought above all to respect it and to work at it consistently and in a disciplined way. I've been struggling with this for years now, and I aim for, hope for this balance.

When it comes to technique and talent, which one do you consider to be the more important?

I believe in three things! That's what I said a few days ago to some of my pupils! Daring, talent and luck. I would include technique under 'daring'. The Greek poet, Kalvos, once said that it takes virtue and daring. To be free, dance requires virtue and daring. If someone is truly a 'free dancer', at least in the way that I perceive freedom -because the question of what freedom is, is a major topic all on its own- then he is also a good dancer whether he dances contemporary dance or classical dance or any other form of dance. Of course, to break the mould and be truly 'free' and 'good' at something you first need to master it. Proper technique in any art form teaches you to study the form, the technique until you have mastered it and then to move beyond it by breaking the mould, and then the same thing over again... That process is ongoing and endless, like a dance spiral! Virtue is a talent, potential... Virtue in terms of the soul. Not just in terms of the body and mind, but also in terms of the heart. The mind is stronger than the body and the heart stronger than the mind. I think something like that was said in Bertolucci's film 'Little Buddha'. The luck factor is also equally important. Being in the right place with the right people. I'd say that fate has a metaphysical role to play in our life... That doesn't mean of course that we are at the whim of fate. I believe we are both born and become what we are. In my work, I like to make frequent reference to the three fates... I consider them an important source of inspiration.

When you start choreographing, what stimuli do you have?

Emotions and images. Images from the mind and the imagination. Imagination and life. The here, there and now. Today and yesterday... Memories and recollections, sounds and scents... Nostalgia and romanticism, while making a nod at today's political situation. Other times, there is nothing at all, a blank. Just the desire to travel. Flirting with the unknown...

Some time ago you chose Heraklion as the place where you create. Looking back and reviewing the situation, have you ever been tempted to leave?

I have been tempted to accept that I'm moving towards the place where I want to be, creating a connection between Crete and abroad. That whole issue requires a lot of work.

Is our city and our people open to the artistic endeavours you have proposed?

Increasing so, and its improving all the time! I want to be optimistic. Having said that, there is still some way ahead of us. Besides, as Osho has said 'the better is the enemy of the good'.

Have you ever felt alone in your endeavours?

Most times, yes. I miss have professional colleagues around... Luckily, I have quite a few good associates and students who believe in me plus friends and family. That, coupled with the island's overall vibe give me courage!

You made contact improvisation as a means of expression well-known here. Tell us something about it. How have people accepted it?

For the last 12 years I've been in love with contact improvisation! I consider it to be a form of movement and expression that it utterly human, true and psychoanalytic at the same time. A good 'contacter' is a good dancer. However, a good dancer need not always necessarily be a good 'contacter'. Contact-improvisation emerged from research into kinesiology started by Steve Paxton in America in collaboration with Magnesium, a dance group originally comprised of 13 men. Contact improvisation is the communication that develops between two or more people through bodily contact, physical forces, gravity, impetus, constant flowing movement, action-reaction and the unexpected that can occur at any moment. It is improvised dance where bodies co-exist as a singular entity, a web of movements that are constantly evolving and re-shaping in space and time. The amazing things about contact improvisation are on the one hand the technical requirements in terms of dance (strength and flexibility together, awareness and calmness simultaneously, the ability to use a diverse dance vocabulary via improvisation and the need to feel at ease with acrobatic movements and other forms of movement) and on the other hand the 'emotional' requirements in terms of the character, conduct, expression, exposure, perception, realisation, acceptance and trust, our relationship with the 'ego', with our partner and the group in general. People see it as a personal challenge, I'd say. They come face to face with various aspects of their character and the 'more daring' among them actually welcome that. The 'fear' factor is still present and generally speaking we are at an early stage, but there is interest and appreciation, and those elements are very important!

Your dance film 'Wrinkles and Dreams' has been a great success winning prizes. Did you expect that?

I didn't expect 5 prizes in Greece and abroad! Wrinkles and Dreams started off from an inner need to create something nostalgic and emotive, against the backdrop of the Agia Triada neighbourhood, using my Asia Minor background, my love for dance, movement and poetry, and the element of community dance as the main ingredients in the film. I am very pleased that Agia Triada has had the chance to travel the world via this film of mine, and for me too, since i was proved right that when something is true and pure inside it, it will shine in one way or another. Agia Triada is the neighbourhood where I was born and grew up, and I am really pleased that recently other people have discovered it and it is 'fashionable' again! As far as film production and direction is concerned, I hope that I get given other chances to create other films because without luck things are very difficult...

The Fysalida Dance Company is now a regular part of our lives with its activities. Was that something easy for a city like Heraklion with little background in dance?

Nothing is easy. Everything is do-able. The three things are needed here too! I believe that what is missing here in general is 'education' in the widest possible sense. Not just in terms of dance and art, but in terms of lifestyle and day-to-day life. That is not just the case here in Heraklion but applies to the whole country. We have let ourselves go to a certain extent, in our relationships with our fellow man and with 'public' affairs. Now it would appear that we are redefining things, becoming more active, pursuing values and rights through more collective procedures. We are experiencing turbulence... Moving from a feeling of being 'dumbed' to a sense of being 'revitalised' and vice versa... As if some shared fear has brought us closer! That is the viewpoint I espoused in my performance 'To Trizoni' which I danced in Athens this March, on the subject of 'what do I like about the crisis'. Art needs to survive against all that.

What are the dance company's next objectives?

There are many objectives and even more ideas! We are trying to be flexible and on stand-by, matching the general climate of our times. We have become even more active in the field of voluntary activities and 'street art' in general. For example, since April this year, we've been hosting an activity which runs counter the crisis by espousing the idea that we can all offer a little something to our fellow man. One Sunday a month we offer 'free stretching' to our fellow citizens in the public spaces of Heraklion, to promote use of those spaces, to emphasise the need to create more parks and the need for artistic and cultural events in them. I believe our cities and town do not need more sofas, nor should we 'discover' the little green our cities have just because a café opens in a park! Next Sunday, 19 June, we will be in Georgiadis Park at 10 o'clock as part of the annual eco-growers and

eco-handcrafts event 'En Oiko'. Since our idea has been generally popular we will also be stretching in Nafpaktos as part of the international symposium on Crisis Communication on 23 and 24 June. The city of Agios Nikolaos has also expressed interest. I wish I could just do things like that, but somehow I have to make a living, and there are a lot of other things in the sidelines waiting such as the next performance about the abuse of women, which has been in the pipeline for some time now, two scripts for short films which are also waiting for the right moment to be realised, and a large surprise event in the centre of Heraklion! Along with another associate a Contact Improvisation Festival is also being organised in Heraklion for the autumn of 2011, while at the same time we are preparing some presentations featuring Fysalida's work (video screenings of the solo performance 'Insect' and 'To Trizoni' and another choreography) in Athens (20 June as part of the Athens Fringe Festival), in Nafpaktos (22-24 June at the international symposium on Crisis Communication), in Patra (1-8 October at the 13th International Film and Culture Festival) and 18, 19, 20 November in Lausanne, Switzerland. Lastly, from 15 to 30 June the video art piece 'Rooms' will be screened at the Tita Briki café-bar in the centre of Heraklion as part of a tour of various art venues, cafes and bars. The subject of this tour is 'art goes everywhere' and is inspired by the televisions to be found in shops all around town screening fashion shows, football and TV series! A lot on my plate, not enough time or money but a great appetite for things!

For more detailed information about Fysalida Dance Company visit the website:

website: www.fysalidance.com

e-mail: contact@fysalidance.com

youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/Fysalidance>

facebook: Fysalida Dance Company

Photo captions:

From the video art piece 'Rooms' to be screened at Tita Briki, June 2011

From the performance 'Insect' in Amorgos town, April 2010

From the performance 'To Trizoni' in Athens, March 2011

From the company's camping seminar, Summer 2010