

4 Critical faculties

Donald Hutera
in Seoul. Photo:
Wonyoung Noh,
SIDance Festival

To be continued...

Grateful that the world failed to end, **Donald Hutera** muses on professional development globally

Congratulations, survivors. We got through the holidays, didn't we? That's nothing to be sniffed at, particularly if you're as Scrooge-like as me. I met the wishes of relatives in snowy Minneapolis, Minnesota birthplace half-way, attending the familial Christmas Eve gathering but with an eyeless Santa Claus (made of felt, by me, during my school years) pinned to my jumper. That's what I call making a statement, although I'm not exactly sure of what kind.

But it's not just the end-of-year holidays we survived. What about the end of the world? Way to go, fellow human beings! (Or, more accurately, not to go.) Simply by still being here, on a reasonably intact planet spinning in an ever-changing universe, each one of us proved the predictions of the Mayan calendar wrong. No mean feat, that.

Yet I wonder, did any of you seriously muse upon our potential cosmic demise? I certainly didn't, and not because I deem such thoughts unhealthy. (Notice, please, how subtly I've just introduced the theme of this issue of *Animated*.) I was just too busy to worry. Honestly, there were times in 2012 when I felt like I could hardly keep up with myself. The autumn was especially replete thanks to professional visits in consecutive months to Asia and Spain. There are more experiences of lasting value associated with each of these trips than I've room to relate, but here's a

handful of highlights.

October: Just call me 'Seoul Man.' On this page you can see me basking in the sunshine at Sung Balsa, an unassumingly small, gloriously secluded little Buddhist temple tucked away on the hillside of a residential neighbourhood in the Korean capital. This place of retreat was a genuine treat during my one free afternoon as a guest of the Seoul Performing Arts Critics (SPAC) Forum, an annual gathering of critics, academics and dance-interested individuals held for the past five years as an adjunct of Seoul International Dance Festival, aka SIDance.

Community dance is a hot topic in Korea these days, so much so that the powers-that-be selected it as the theme of the two most recent SPAC conferences. They also requested that this year I speak about Big Dance, especially in light of its expansion during the Olympics. Indeed, Big Dance seemed to be a source of no little interest for my listeners; the fact that so much happens during it, and often on such a grand scale, understandably impressed them. Given the event's propensity for record-busting gigantism, I couldn't resist making a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that maybe now is an opportune time to institute an alternative cultural conglomerate called Small Dance. I've no idea how well my tiny irony translated into Korean.

November: It was fascinating to

be in Beijing during the Communist Party's 18th National Congress even if, alas, the high degree of security meant I was unable to keep my 'date' with Mao's corpse. Tiananmen Square, where his preserved remains are displayed, and the rest of the capital's governmental heart were sealed off from the public as tightly as the proverbial drum.

Still, it was a privilege to be invited back to Beijing for the third incarnation of Dancecross. In 2012 the ongoing creative partnership between Middlesex University, Beijing Dance Academy (BDA) and Taipei International University of the Arts (aka TNUA, although I always read it as TUNA) produced ten short new works by choreographers from each location but featuring only dancers from the two Asian cities. The UK choreographers were Robin Dingemans, Annie Pui Ling





Lok and Rachel Lopez de la Nieta, each of whom made a distinctive contribution to an aesthetically varied bill. But good as their work and that of their Asian counterparts was, what struck me most was how much this project meant for the more than two dozen dancers involved. The closing party was a lump-in-throat occasion with many warmly tearful, endearingly funny expressions of gratitude for the opportunity provided. I couldn't have had a better reminder of dance's potential for changing and expanding lives, hearts and minds. It'll be interesting to observe the impact Dancecross has when it's transplanted to London and The Place in 2013.

December: Now in its 26th edition, and this year held in the huge and handsomely converted slaughterhouse Matadero, the Certamen Coreografico de Madrid is a Spanish dance platform

centred on artistic development and support. As a member of the five-person 'jurado,' or jury, I was able to help bestow close to 20 prizes upon some of the makers of the 16 dances in competition. Apart from a top cash prize of five thousand Euros, these ranged from residencies and scholarships in Spain and abroad to studio and tech time. Such generosity is uncommon; it was like Christmas meets the Oscars minus the latter's phony, self-congratulatory mega-bucks glam. And what a brilliant idea to have a junior jury working alongside us. They're the dance-goers of the future. Extra proof, I think, that the Mayans got it wrong.

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registered in England and Wales no.
2415458. Registered Charity no. 328392
VAT no. 109056137

Published by Countrywide Publications

Fountain Way
Reydon Business Park
Reydon
Suffolk
IP18 6DH
T: +44 (0)1502 725870
Design: Mark Shreeve
Advertising: Chloe Stockdale
Printers: Micropress Printers Ltd,
Reydon, Suffolk, UK

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Supported using public funding by
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