



Donald Hutera, Lucy Guerin's Untrained workshop, Southbank Centre, London. Photo: Katie Toms

Marathon man

Donald Hutera – aka the man who did too much – finds himself once more going for the burn

A word of advice from the adventurous, or the foolish, or the wise (I often feel like all three at once): life doesn't necessarily become easier as one matures. It sometimes seems more challenging, or difficult, or enriched. At least that's been my experience in the summer of 2013.

I write this having just reached the end of a breathless, near-sleepless third week at the Edinburgh Festival. Not that anybody's counting, but as of tonight I've seen 95 and a half shows in 21 days. (The half was the pre-interval portion of a Chinese staging of *Coriolanus* featuring two heavy-metal rock bands.) Being here has been akin to attending a self-styled Cultural Olympiad with the city itself functioning like a gorgeously granite, people-packed open-air gym and me a performance-mad marathon runner carrying a flaming torch for all things steeped in art and entertainment.

Before Edfest madness kicked in there was U.Dance 2013 in Leeds. Overseen by Youth Dance England, what that entailed was 'only' three jam-packed, high-spirited days of writing workshops plus five performances. There was plenty of good work on offer, too, by young artists and youth groups from all over the country. Indeed, one mixed bill was so fine I felt like some privileged birthday boy allowed to open one desirable prezzie after another.

That's not a dissimilar to how I've felt curating the first GOlive Dance and Performance Festival. What, you might well ask, is that? A three-week season featuring work by more than 50 artists, all staged up-close and personal within a 50-seat black box theatre the size of a shoebox above a pub in north London. Pulling a programme together in a relatively short time-frame (five weeks, essentially) has been great, if full-on, fun and a huge learning curve.

All the above activities have in various ways caused me to question what I want out of any cultural experience and how I'm ready, willing and able to go for it? Not to the point of nausea, although that is what happened to me during a workshop based around Australian choreographer Lucy Guerin's performance *Untrained*.

Presented at London's Southbank Centre, *Untrained*

is a quirky conceptual comedy of dance/theatre games comparing and contrasting the physical skills and performing personalities of two pairs of dancers – one duo professionally trained, the other not. The tenor of the 75-minute performance is direct, task-oriented and, particularly for the non-pros, quite exposing. It's also great fun to watch. Guerin smartly keeps us engaged while slipping in worthwhile questions about artistic, cultural and social expectations and stereotypes.

Wanting to learn more about the show first-hand I, along with a few other game souls, signed up for a company workshop conducted by Alisdair Macindoe and Ross McCormack – both strong dancers endowed with a playful confidence. They got us to walk, stretch, swerve, twist and rotate in a monkey-see, monkey-do fashion faithful to the way *Untrained* itself unfolds onstage.

Now I am, as I'm prone to say, fairly fit for an old fart of 56 and thought I was just about keeping up with the pace. But suddenly a draining queasiness crept up on this sweaty human pretzel. I felt on the verge of fainting, or worse. (I was later told I'd turned an unspecified shade of green.) It was my body telling me it had reached a limit. I'd no choice but to obey, stumbling away from the workshop in search of fresh air, cool water and a respite from physical exertion. Visual evidence of my earlier efforts (and not, thankfully, the somewhat ignominious results) accompanies this text.

The workshop was a valuable opportunity, as is everything else I've written about above. Speaking of opportunities, I'd like to take this one to thank outgoing FCD Creative Director Ken Bartlett for significantly expanding and thus re-shaping my grasp of this wonderful beast called dance: what it is, what it can do, who can do it. During his long term at FCD Ken's been wise, witty, sometimes outspoken, often warm but occasionally crusty and unquestionably dedicated to the cause of dance and the arts for everyone.

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