

# Pioneers Pragmatists Mobilisers Catalysts People!

Writer, editor and veteran arts journalist, **Donald Hutera**, shares his poetic response to the People Dancing International Event in Wales in November 2014



**It happened nearly a month ago as I write these words, but in a sense I'm still reeling from People Dancing.** Still trying to wrap my head around this international event welcoming 300-plus delegates from 22 countries to the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) in Cardiff Bay for two and half days of presentations, workshops and performances in mid-November, 2014. It was, no doubt about it, a whopper. Massive building, huge attendance, potentially big and positive repercussions. There was simply no way for a single person to grasp it all.

Nevertheless, my job, aside from chairing a discussion among three artists (Rosemary Lee, Luca Silvestrini and Cai Tomos), was to somehow soak up as much of the whole shebang as best I could and then distill some useful or insightful words from the experience to share with the delegates. This sharing would come at the very end of the event, just before the thanks and farewells in a strand of the schedule dubbed Reflections and Reimagining the Future. No small task, but how to do

it? The question tickled and gnawed at me as 'show-time' approached. As I was, in effect, on a double-bill with Tim Casson (presenting the latest version of his ongoing solo dance project The Dance WE Made), I knew I could safely leave the movement to him and rely on speech. But whatever I said had to matter, to rebound back to the delegates and to some degree point a way ahead.

Below is the result, stitched together relatively quickly from a plethora of notes and delivered with what I trust was a certain amount of firebrand zeal (well, that was the intention anyway) but in truth probably accompanied by more than a touch of 'first-night nerves'. I guess I'd call it a performance-poem, and one that's received only minimal editing from the way it was presented. Perhaps the only other thing I ought to explain is the opening phrase – translated from Swahili as 'no problem' and pinched from The Lion King, given that the unstoppable stage version of Disney's film was also playing on the WMC's vast premises.

## **"Hakuna Matata!**

Some say it in movement. Others say it in words.

My name is People Dancing. Your name is People Dancing.

I've been gathering at this gathering. Gathering impressions of People Dancing.

Like some human rewind I've been asked to offer you these regurgitated impressions now.

Today I'm an impressionist. Not a mimic, but a distracted and semi-abstract painter whose pigments are words. I'm brushing against People Dancing. This is my painting. Let's call it Figments of Re-Imagination.

'Am I preaching to the converted?' I'm poaching your words and ideas; stealing your fire, echoing our collective thunder, mirroring your hunger.

I have a huge appetite for dance and the arts. Here at People Dancing I feel like I've been given a small plate at a big buffet.

I'm leaving the table well-fed with stimulating flavours on my tongue.

I'm carrying the weight of words,



Donald Hutera, People Dancing event 2014. Photo: Rachel Cherry

phrases, thoughts. I've been carried along on the current of your actions; your questions have, even if only temporarily, become my questions.

Pioneers. Pragmatists. Mobilisers. Catalysts. People!

In this sea of possibilities what streams are you currently swimming in? Where will they take us? Where do you want to go? Where do we/you/I belong?

'How can I say what I want to say with the tools I've been given,' and in the time allotted?

'The dancers say it makes them better people.'

Better People Dancing.

'Putting the arts centrestage.'

Who puts the art in articulation?

'There is nothing else I could do.'

'The whole thing hinges on trust.'

Dance as 'a shortcut to happiness'.

Are we one big family? Feeling happy? Feeling functional?

Cuts. Where's the FUN in funding? 'No jobs.' 'No future.' No, no, no.

Are we able to 'do the things that we never thought we could'?

Are we going to be allowed?

'The good times are comin' / they're comin' real soon / and I'm not just pitchin' pennies at the moon...' (Thank you, Mama Cass.)

I hear the call of yes, the lure not of less but more. And 'My more-having would be as a sauce to make me hunger more'. (Thank you, William Shakespeare.)

I'm 'embedded' but sometimes I fall out of that bed and...it's okay.

Fall. Fail. 'Spring back up. Leap at opportunities. Jump into the unknown.' Jump for joy. Joy. Justice.

I've heard tell of practicalities and tales of passion, seen rituals of pleasure, conflict, pain. 'History in motion.'

Somewhere on this island there's a mum with Lord of the Flies tattooed on her arm.

In my head there's a second-hand memory of another mum in her eighties dancing with an invisible partner in her kitchen - 'a vision of possibilities'.

Powerful, poetic women - I'm your Manet/Monet today.

Influential, inspirational, sensitive,

sensorial, uncensored men and women - I'm your reflective mirror.

I see 'epic arts under dark skies'. Idealism and realism. Theories gone wild in search of relevance. Evidence that education is ageless.

I've exposed myself here. My words - if not my tongue - in your ears.

Or do these pathetic words obscure my/your/our truths?

Final slice of this word-pie:

People, connect the dots for yourselves.

People, find partners, continue dialogue.

PEOPLE, relate, perpetuate.

Diolch yn fawr. Thank you."

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#### Info

Donald's writing has appeared in The Times, Time Out, Dance Europe and many other publications and websites world-wide.

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