

Migrations Europa Exchange

Simona Scotto is a dance artist and choreographer who specialises in dance education and performance for over-55s. She is the Director and founder of Counterpoint Dance Company, Rehearsal Director of Sadler's Wells' Company of Elders and an Associate Artist at Cubitt Artists. Her latest work, funded by Arts Council England, is Migrations Europa Exchange

Migrations Europa Exchange was a mini festival celebrating the positive contribution migrants bring to British life. This is the second of my Migrations projects funded by Arts Council England. It has developed from a collaboration with two community companies, one of older dancers and the other of disabled actors. The project was born thanks to a visit to Tate Britain in 2012, where I saw an exhibition called Migrations that highlighted how various migrant artists influenced the British art scene. I was so touched by the exhibition, being a migrant myself, that I wanted to create a show that explored migration and talked about how people perceived it. My first work was called Migrations London Tour and was shown at the Bull Theatre in Barnet, The Chelsea Theatre and the Space theatre in the Isle of Dogs.

Two years later I felt very strongly about continuing to work on the subject especially because of the

so-called 'migration crisis' in Europe. I wanted to help counterbalance the negative press around migrants, so Migrations Europa Exchange was born. The title reflects my desire to explore the issues around migration, wanting to know the truth in terms of positive and negative effects of migration in this country and wanting to shed a light on the positive contributions migrants bring to the UK and in this case to London life.

The festival

Working on the Migrations festival has stretched me in many ways. Whilst the first project acted as a vessel for exploration about the meaning of migration in terms of space, time and movement, with the second project I wanted to bring various artforms, from migrant and British artists, to give a voice to the artists and hear how they have lived and perceived migration.

The festival involved an educational tour through the areas of Hackney



that have been influenced by the Jewish community, an art exhibition of aural and Film installations presenting migrants' work and folk dance workshops, as well as a dance and dinner performance evening, presenting new commissions by dancers of all ages and abilities. Prior to the festival itself we had pop up performances at various locations in London and offered workshops, led by older artists, to schools to promote the festival. Paintings, photographic work and interactive live installations made the festival an immersive and reflective experience for the dancers and the audiences alike. Having food as part of the evening performance brought an additional element to experiencing the contributions other cultures bring to Britain.

The process

As I specialised in older dancers' performance work I found this project inspired them as much as it inspired



Jill Evans, Robin Wallach, Maureen Brown, Andy Newman, Philippa Abrahims, Rosalind Topping, Oemi Seyono, Almeric Johnson, John Newbery, Julie Drake and Chris Burrows, A place I call home, Migrations Europa Festival. Photo: Mario Scotto

me. My practice had gone further than just creating the odd dance piece for my company and then performing it in various venues. Producing a mini festival had brought me to understand the power of working with a team of people united in the same goal.

The project broadened both my dancers' and my own understanding of working with different processes to create artwork, to connect with other artists, companies and organisations, as well as to connect with audiences of all types and ages. Through dance workshops, pop up performances and online articles we have reached people we would not normally reach with a small performance in a single location.

Friends and families of participants have had their own perceptions of migration challenged and perhaps they were encouraged to look for the truth around migration events and connect with migrants as actual people. One of the most powerful elements this festival has brought about is hearing

the stories of people who have lived through migration and who have left their own home to move to an alien culture and place; brave people who left everything they knew behind. How can we not be affected by hearing these stories from others, exactly like us, just part of a different culture? Perhaps we might also realise that we may have experienced some type of migration in our own way.

Where next?

The plan for me now is to think about where the Migrations project goes next. I want to connect with more people; organisations and groups who want to contribute to the idea of celebrating migrants' contributions to their own countries. I am looking to take the festival on tour to other areas in the UK and Europe, as I am keen to explore and find out how other countries live with migration and how they relate to migrants. For the dancers it's a challenge, an

adventure, and a way to grow as performers by experiencing other artists' ways of working, being engaged with other professional performers and by engaging with foreign communities. For me it's another challenge to find ways to create connections, relationships, to grow as a choreographer and artist by exchanging ideas with likeminded people.

During this journey I have found so many positive elements to migration and I have created a blog called Migrations Europa Exchange Forum where I have shared my findings and encouraged other people to contribute – please do take a look. And if anyone wants to get in touch regarding this project then please do!

Info

www.simonascotto.com

www.counterpointdance.co.uk

+44 (0)7803 100 639

www.facebook.com/migrationeuropaforum