

Movement for Stage and Screen

Laban Guild Northern Network at The University of the West of Scotland, Ayr Campus on Wednesday 25 September 2019

Helen Bryce, Dr James Layton and Bobbie Millar

Bobbie Millar, Regional Representative for the Northern Network, and Dr James Layton, FHEA, Lecturer in Performance, University of the West of Scotland, worked together to plan and organise the study day. (At the Northern Network event in Cumbria in November 2018, James was a participant; in the closing session on the day next steps were discussed and James offered to host a study day at the University of the West of Scotland Ayr Campus in September 2019.) They invited Dr Stuart Hopps to be the principal tutor for the day and Helen Bryce to give an introduction to aspects of Laban's work. James opened the study day, Movement for Stage and Screen, to his first and third year Performance students to attend in their own time; 32 out of the 40 students participated. All available places were taken up by the students and the university welcomed the event and made a significant financial contribution to the event.

On the day, Bobbie Millar introduced the study day and the tutors, and described the work of the Laban Guild. Helen Bryce taught the introductory session with a focus firstly on the use of personal and general space, building concentration and observation. This included a variety of movement experiences as individuals and with a partner. The group then became more aware of others and used their movement ideas to relate to other members of the group. Next the group explored a short movement experience in two large groups and with a partner to express different rhythmic patterns based on conflict. Thirdly, in two large groups the movers explored contrasting aspects of stability and agitation in movement.

The principal tutor, Stuart Hopps led the next two demanding and exacting sessions sharing his professional expertise with the students. His sessions were based around 'America' from *West Side Story* and his starting point was the distinctive rhythm. Some students were aware of hemiola and how this refers to three beats of equal value in the time normally occupied by two beats. Stuart explained this to the group and helped them clap out the rhythm. The participants entered into the tasks with great energy and concentration and made very good progress in the time available. It was tremendous fun and the performers moved with verve and some style.

The final session was led by Bobbie who invited questions, of which there were many, and the participants were rapt by Stuart's description and accounts of his wide-ranging professional experience. There was the opportunity for discussion and James will take further feedback from the students and liaise with Bobbie to consider next steps. Bobbie thanked James for initiating the study day and his collaboration in the planning and organisation to host the event. There was a vote of thanks to Stuart and Helen.

James reported that the workshops with Stuart and Helen provided the students with an excellent opportunity to participate in movement based activities, something which



UWS students working with Helen



Stuart in conversation with students in UWS

is not a core part of the BA (Hons) Performance programme at UWS. The group consisted of first year (SCQF Level 8) and third year (SCQF Level 9) students. Some of the students had prior experience of dance and movement although the majority were beginners. There was an excellent level of engagement by the students who rose to the challenge of tackling some challenging choreographic ideas. Helen's session was an accessible introduction to movement work and it was interesting to see how the students engaged with the creative freedom available in contrast to the more didactic approach of Stuart's choreography in the second workshop.

This juxtaposition of approaches prompted me to consider the ways in which students learn and that - for some students - the freedom provided by Helen's more creative approach was somewhat challenging, as they have been immersed in a school system which has little time or space for empirical learning, risk taking and breaking conventional moulds. The challenge for many students entering higher education is to find a balanced response to the opportunities presented to them and to develop the confidence and self-discipline to move away from a teacher/student or expert/novice paradigm that dominates much pre-HE education. Similarly, the choreographer-as-instructor rather than creative facilitator might be a model that still has its place although, to engage more people and particularly 'non-dancers' in dance, finding a similar balance may be necessary.

Despite hinting at an apparent tension between the didactic and the creative, I believe that the opportunities to learn from the experience of individuals eminent in their field should not be underestimated, which was an aspect appreciated by all participants and observers at this Laban study day at UWS. Students reported that: 'When attending the Laban workshop, I found it very enjoyable and thought it was a great experience to get to meet and learn from those who work in the field of arts professionally'; 'It was a great opportunity to have, and would love to do it again in the future'; 'I found the Laban workshop to be really interesting and fun while still teaching me a lot. It was great to see an insight on the work that they do and I loved getting to explore their techniques'.

A study day will be planned for September 2020.

Photographs taken on the day by Bobbie Millar.