



ICDF Networks

February 2020

Network for Dance Artists



The Playground :-)



Photos: From "The Playground"

My name is Annasara Yderstedt and I live in Stockholm, Sweden. In 2014 I started my own dance company, MANSADANS, which now consists of 12 dancers from Sweden and Norway.

Right now, we are touring with a piece called "The Playground" which is an interactive, site-specific, dance performance for children. An ordinary playground becomes the place for an extraordinary dance adventure when two dancers in red skirts introduce dance and movement in the children's play and make choreographic choices based on the audience, surroundings and relationships that arise. The focus is on giving the children an artistic experience where they themselves are active and co-creative. The show is inclusive and warm, and all the children are seen and integrated in a natural and safe way.

The performance was developed in Frankfurt, Germany and was premiered there at Starke Stücke Festival in March, 2017. Since, we have had the opportunity to show "The Playground" 47 times in 6 different countries all over the world and we are still touring.

Every performance is unique and we are always filled up afterwards with the magical meeting between the dancers and the children at a place where they feel safe and we are invited into their play arena with a dancer perspective. The experience is filled with admiration, playfulness, curiosity and giggling laughter among the children. The spectators have been touched by the interaction between the children and the dancers. After the dancers have left the playground the performance often continues like an echo of what has happened. The children continue to play, dance and explore the playground and repeat some of the episodes of the performance as well as telling people around them about their experience.

I feel blessed to be able to tour with this performance and it would not be possible without God's grace and Him opening up doors for us. And I see this performance reflecting what Jesus said in Matthew 19:14, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

If you are interested in "The Playground" and ANSADANS, please click on the following links:

Trailer: <https://youtu.be/4gOmDPKMEY4>

Website: <https://www.ansadans.com/>

Blessings,

Annasara Yderstedt

An Interview with Lisa Wilson

After publishing the article in our January Newsletter on the production of “Chronicles” by the Western Cape region of the Christian Dance Fellowship of South Africa, we decided to conduct an interview with Lisa Wilson to find out more about how she sees and experiences dance as a teacher/lecturer, choreographer and dancer.

1. We know that you were born in Jamaica, studied in Australia and are now living in South Africa. How do you think experiencing different cultures has shaped you as a person and as a dancer?

Experiencing different cultures has expanded my ways of being, seeing and thinking in the world. Living in different cultures exposed me to different ways people live in and interact with the world and so offered me more ways of being and thinking in the world beyond my cultural script. Living in different cultures has also strengthened my identity through helping me to understand and define the things I value the most in life and the aspects of self that are non- negotiable and those aspects which are fluid. These experiences have given me the confidence to interact with cultural diversity and to willingly share my world with others. Dance was my gateway to the world as I studied dance in different places and participated in dance festivals that gathered dancers from all over the world. Experiencing different cultures and people through dance fueled my passion for dance and developed a strong appreciation for dance as a means of cultural expression and exchange.

2. Currently being a lecturer in dance at the University of Cape Town you have your finger on the pulse of what is happening in the dance environment as dance is constantly evolving. Is there a specific trend that you can see evolving that will come more to the foreground in the future?

The current trend is definitely towards interdisciplinary art making and collaborations across disciplines and fields. For example, in dance itself you may find classical ballet dancers collaborating with hip-hop musicians and street dancers, or contemporary dancers collaborating with filmmakers and digital media technology or science fiction to create new kinds of performances that are yet to be defined and categorized. It is current belief that interdisciplinary collaborations expand the creative possibilities of individual disciplines and generate new and exciting contemporary ideas and platforms through which art can be explored.



Photos: Lisa from the production “Chronicles”

3. You have a wonderful gift of being able to choreograph a dance for experienced and inexperienced dancers together in one dance with an end result that can be described as ‘powerful’ without making anyone feel inferior with their part. How do you do it?

I think that one can successfully create choreography with dancers of mixed abilities if you work with the larger aesthetic concepts of Space, Time, Relationship, Force/energy, Play and not just concentrate on the medium of the body and what movements it can or cannot do. Meaning and interpretation in a piece of choreography is generated through the interaction of multiple elements and layers of relationships. If one understands the craft in this way as opposed to seeing choreography as putting movement to the lyrics of a song, then one can make strong use of different kinds of bodies and abilities, even objects, to communicate through dance.



4. *You have been to a few ICDF international conferences / gatherings as a dancer and a teacher. Are there any experiences that stood out for you?*

What has stood out to me over the years at the ICDF conferences is the strong sense of freedom to worship through dance in many forms and the inclusive nature of the conferences. Having grown up in a church where there were many rules and restrictions regarding the use of dance, I found being in the presence of dancers who during worship praised God with their bodies without inhibition or fear, and who encouraged others to do the same, to be an empowering and liberating experience. At the conferences people of different ages (young and old), gender and cultures dance, breaking away from stereotypes in dance/dance ministry practices to give God all the glory that He deserves. I find such inclusivity to be powerful acts of redemption and grace.

5. *As a Christian artist and dancer, if there is one thing that you would like to see the dance ministry achieve in a spectacular manner, what would that be?*

As a Christian artist I would love to see more creative risk-taking in dance ministries. Have you ever danced to spoken word and not music? Have you ever tried including the congregation into your dance? Have you ever offered to teach a couples dance as part of the marriage ministry course at your church? We should never strive to have one model of how we do dance ministry given how creative our God is. I am very thankful that more and more churches are birthing dance ministries. This first step is worthy of celebration. However, as we grow in the ministry and mature in knowledge, skills and understanding, I pray that dance leaders will be hungry for more of God's creativity and artistry and endeavor to explore more deeply the gift and power of dance with its vast possibilities and transforming energies.

Members of our Dance Artists Network will have studied dance to professional or semi-professional level. They are trained to a high standard and will be involved in ministry, professional companies, as independent dance artists, mission work, or educational roles. Members usually have at least 3 years full-time training as dancers and/or are very experienced performers. They have an eye also to see, and will act on, the creative possibilities of engaging their faith within their culture.

This network then connects those Christian dance artists who are seeking to make a difference to our culture through their professional training / positions in the dance arena. Most of us do not work at that level and are not in these positions but we can learn from them and in so doing bring more to our own repertoire and choreography and thus into the areas where we do work.

The position of Network Leader for this Network is currently vacant. If you feel drawn to it and want to find out more please contact us at icdfworld@gmail.com

Life as a Professional Dancer ... a testimony

Beth Bluett-Spicer is one of the Network Leaders for the ICDF Network for Dance Teachers who has started her dance career as a professional ballet dancer. We have asked her to share with us about this life ... the challenges, the disappointments and the triumphs. Here is a glimpse of her life story.

THE BEGINNING

I believe God plants a desire in hearts. There may be a catalyst event. For me it was when my father took me to a ballet company performance when I was 5 years of age. I remember seeing a dancer in a blue dress twirling and whirling vibrantly. I said to myself, 'I can do that!' Well of course I couldn't but soon after I started ballet lessons. At 15 years I joined the famous Hallidays' Dance Studio in the city (Sydney) to study 'full time'. I marveled that I had a suitable physique for the leaps and vibrant expressiveness of ballet and found that other hopeful dancers did not.

My aspiration was to win Hallidays' bi-annual overseas scholarship to Rosella Hightower's famous Centre de Danse Classique in Cannes France. It was where professional and pre professional dancers from all over the world came to learn Madam Hightower's famous gravity defying technique to take back to where they had come from. I won the scholarship and set off to France at 17 years of age. These were the days when telephone calls were too expensive and there was no email, Facebook or electronic communications. I was very homesick, I cried night and day for several months, except when I was dancing. The Dance Centre was like a hotel with the comings and goings of professional dancers from all over the globe! It was a 4-story building with 2 floors of dormitories and 2 floors of dining room and studios. I was put in the 'professionelle' classes with some very famous dancers, each wanting to up-skill by learning Madam Hightower's unique virtuoso training while holidaying on the Riviera. I was however honoured to be asked to join Madam's professional dance company (Rosella Hightower's Danse Troupe) on my 3rd day there.



Beth at the age of 17

WHAT IT WAS LIKE

The dance classes and rehearsal for ballets were exhilarating to me!

Firstly, the dance technique gave a new understanding of the dynamics of the body. I found that by following Madam's micro instructions I was able to do 4 or 5 pirouettes at a time with the utmost of ease. (In Sydney I could do 2 and 3 on a good day). It also enabled me to do almost any leap and change of weight with complete freedom of movement. Of an evening I would write down Madam's succinct instructions on technique and I still have that French 'cahier' (notebook). It is a treasure trove of Madam's technical instructions. Unbeknown to me at the time, God would use this information for me to write the Living Dance International curriculum in the future!

At the time I wrote copious tearful letters to my family. I wrote about the yummy French food and the famous people who had visited the Danse Centre. Balanchine, Bejart, Maya Plisetskaya, Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux, Marcia Haydee, Erik Bruhn, Svetlana Beriosova, Patricia Wilde, Eva Evdokimova and many other leading dancers of the time. Maina Gielgud was a fellow dancer in the same company. When I was promoted to soloist, I once (only) shared the same billing rung as her!

The company rehearsals were interesting, and the tours were very exciting. We danced in some beautiful opera houses like I had never seen in Australia. These were in Monte Carlo, Toulon, Cannes, (a floating pontoon stage in Beaulieu sur Mer), Paris, Brussels and a film in London.

Some roles I played, "La fille que fait mal", 'Elizabeth' mother of Jean Baptiste, Bacchanal standing on Mr. France's (body builder champion) shoulders, and angel, a Tzigane, a solo as a nymph that had 53 pirouettes, in a 2-minute dance!

My personal life picked up in September, after the summer holidays, with dancers and students from all over the world arriving who were there to stay for the whole year. It became less like a hotel of professional dancers coming and going. I made new friends and my best friend was from the opera ballet in Cincinnati Ohio (US). We had French lessons every morning at 8am and I acquired a taste for French food which became a huge battle for me to keep my weight that of a dancer!



Beth centre on the floating stage Beaulieu sur Mer (newspaper clipping)

I looked for a church to attend and there was an Anglican church nearby. The only English speaking one in Cannes. It was what we would call 'high church'. It was very ornate and very social. The minister held elegant banquets under the setting sun on the flat roof top of the Georgian manse. I attended the church for a while but didn't receive

anything spiritual from it. Eventually I stopped going because I noticed not one other dancer went to church. I thought to myself perhaps Christianity was a good way to grow up but now I was a young woman of the world making a name for myself, I did not need it. How wrong I was!

ELATION ... THEN KNOCK BACKS

After dancing in a musical film in London called 'The Yellow Hat', I returned to Cannes. The Centre de Danse Classique held a dance competition to be judged by Roland Petit, Mania Gielgud, Darsonval and other who's who of ballet in France. It was to be in the presence of Princess Grace de Monaco!

I was eligible to enter the 'Professionelle – filles' section. My main contender was a soloist from San Francisco Ballet. Each in our section had to dance Aurora's solo from Sleeping Beauty. I fell down in a pirouettes section! Yes, flat on the stage but got up and continued to the end. With no chance of winning, I went home straight after my dance! The next morning my then boyfriend asked, 'Where were you last night? You won! They announced you and no one came up onto stage to receive the certificate!' A certificate from Princess Grace! Oh no I missed it! Well I do still have a that certificate signed by Princess Grace in her own handwriting!

Soon I was plagued by a knee injury. I didn't know how to ask for help. There were no baths to soak and relax muscles as I was used to in Australia, just tepid showers! I went to a few doctors and massage therapists, but nothing helped and I missed many important roles. I did manage to dance in The Opera Ballet in Brussels over their Christmas season, where I saw my first snow! I was taking tablets that seemed to heal my knee but had decided to go to London after that season to get free treatment.

I couldn't work as a professional dancer due to my knee so I enrolled in the prestigious Royal Ballet School, (RBS) London. During that time my knee injury flared up again when the tablets ran out. I was told the tablets were only painkillers and I was masking the damage to my knee by dancing on it! I was quite depressed and put on weight. I was using food for comfort! The Beatles song 'Yesterday' was my theme song: 'Yesterday my troubles seemed so far away now it looks as though they're here to stay'. I eventually got help and my knee recovered, and the deputy principal of RBS gave me free private lessons to rehabilitate. This was unheard of! I ended up winning first place in my class in the end of year examinations.

Another good thing happened. I got to work as an usherette at The Royal Opera House Covent Garden. The reason was not so good though. My parents' nursery at Belrose had a bushfire come through and burnt thousands of dollars worth of plants. I was offered the coveted job of usheretting to help pay my RBS fees. By watching great dancers, one imbibes so much. It goes into the subconscious, I believe. I saw Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, and numerous other stars, and wonderful ballets. I saw Joan Sutherland and Maria Callas in operas too.

The six-day war in Israel happened during my time at RBS in 1967. My best friend at RBS was Jewish from Mount Carmel. She was beside herself getting ready to go back and take up arms then suddenly it was over before she left! She sent me newspaper clippings of the many miracles surrounding this a few months later. I wanted to rejoin a church as my life, though some good things were happening, was getting unmanageable. Maybe I had neglected God, I thought! My Israeli friend discourage me so I didn't attend. What I didn't know at the time was how many Jewish people thought Christian's were responsible for the Holocaust due to the silence of the church in Germany during WW11!

AUSTRALIAN BALLET JOB OFFER

The offer of a contract with the Australian ballet brought me home only to find out it was only with a subsidiary/offshoot company, 'Athletes and Dancers', that went around to the high schools in NSW.



I was only 20 years of age. I was depressed and upset with myself and found it really isolating to be back in suburbia after living a different life in Europe and London. I had no friends. No school friends. No dancing friends. My friends were overseas. Then I received a letter from my best dancing friend's parents from Cincinnati. Janet, my best friend, had died in a small plane accident! I was stunned!

I hated myself for coming this far but still not able to realise my dreams. My parents had supported me financially at RBS and through my time of being injured. They encouraged me and I had not come through for them.

I became a compulsive eater and reached 60 kilos (unheard of for a dancer) so I didn't get into the Australian Ballet after the 'Athletes and Dancers' finished! I had one disappointment after another. I couldn't get myself out of a very disturbed mindset. I wanted to dance and I wanted to get back to Europe!

WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSSES ANOTHER OPENS

I had recently been reading the saying of Confucius and Buddha, trying to sort myself out and get in harmony with my inner self with the aim to overcoming my food addiction! Both Buddha and Confucius said they had not found what life was about or had not found the meaning of life. I thought, 'Well I'm not going to follow them! If they could not find it what hope would I have of finding it!'

I met a friend coming home on the bus. He was a fellowship leader from my former church at Forestville. He said, 'How did your trip to Europe go?' I decided to tell him the truth that, though I had a wonderful time, nothing was working out for me now! He said, 'Maybe you are out of harmony with God! My reaction which I kept to myself was, "Me, out of harmony with God! If there is a God, I didn't want to be out of harmony with him!" I decided to read the Gospels in a modern translation. A fresh take. Maybe I threw the 'baby out with the bathwater'. I was massively struck by Jesus as a man! There has been no one like him! Then I read that he said, 'I have come that they may have life and life more abundantly'. I said to myself, 'I don't have life abundantly! I'd better check this out. I want life 'more abundantly!'

My sister, Barbara, on the other hand, was having the time of her life with a fellowship group from a St Ives church. She had lots of friends. I had none! So due to my turmoil within, I decided to go with her to 'check it out'. The fellowship wasn't really my scene but a young fellow there said he had just become a Christian and God helped him get over a sexual addiction! I told him about my troubled state. He said just go home and ask Jesus into your life. He was adamant! That's what you do! Well I went home and alone in my bedroom, not knowing if I was talking to the air, said 'Jesus if you are there, would you come into my life'. At that moment, I suddenly knew I was not alone. Something had quantumly changed but no outward sign was different, but I knew that I knew that I knew, there was a presence with me, and it felt good. Something happened. I cannot explain it. I knew I was not alone, and every-thing was going to be alright.

So, what do I do? I ask God to help me lose weight so I could get into the Australian Ballet.

I went through a period of getting to know God in a most wonderful and fulfilling way - but I didn't lose weight! Soon I realised I don't ask God to do my will/my dream but I instead find out what His will/his dream for me is and get about doing that! It was a great time and I gradually got back to my best weight, about 53 kilos, and I was dancing my best again.

During this time, I auditioned with Netherland Dance Theater (NDT) who were performing in Sydney. I still thought to get back to Europe. After I auditioned, the director of NDT said she would have taken me on, except they had just hired 3 dancers from the Australian Ballet the week before! Peggy Van Praagh (director of the Australian Ballet at the time) was in the theatre and saw my audition. I asked as there were no vacancies in NDT, would there be a place for me in the Australian Ballet. She said they don't take soloist who had not come up through the ranks of the corps de ballet! She considered me soloist level in the world-famous Australian ballet company. It was a backhand compliment but no dance job I wanted was offered. I was too much of a 'ballet snob' to be a lead dancer in the Qld ballet as it was only a fledgling company at the time.



A recent photo of Beth

The only dancing job I could get was in a musical with the 'Black & White Minstrels'. Not what I wanted to do. Not classical ballet but I was a jazz and contemporary dancer too so could do this. My parents thought I should accept it as it was the only ballet professional work on offer. They were very understanding parents and had put so much into my career, so I was torn between loyalty to such lovely parents who truly wanted the best for me and the inner strong conviction to turn down the offer without any clue as to what I would do instead. How could I face them for all they had done for me!?

Before going home I attended a class at the Hallidays', my former teachers. What would they say? I had won their overseas scholarship, was a fine dancer but now had no professional dancing work! Well after that very class before facing my parents to tell them I had turned down the job, a friend, Jane Farrelly who also attended, said, 'Beth, I am about to get married and I have to give up one of my ballet schools as it is too much for me. Would you be interested in taking on my ballet school in Frenchs Forest?'

Who could believe the timing, the job and the location? Frenchs Forest was the next suburb to me at Belrose! Teaching was not what you call on my 'bucket list' but it was a ballet job my parents would think a worthy occupation for a dancer! I could go home and say I gave up the 'Black & White Minstrels' but have been offered a ballet school in Frenchs Forest! Jane just gave it to me. I didn't have to buy it from her! My dance teaching career however is the subject of another story.

During my teaching years I danced at Fusion Outreach concerts around Australia and entered a choreographic piece in the Australian Choreographic competition. One thing I did appreciate was dancing the role I always wanted - alternating with Georgina Parkinson from the Royal Ballet London dancing 'Queen of the Willis' in Sydney Festival Ballet Company.

WHAT I GAVE UP and WHAT THE LORD GAVE BACK TO ME

What I wanted was to dance until I was 35 on the grand opera stages of Europe. If I did my own plan what would have been the outcome? I would be just a memory, one of many dancers audiences would remember. By allowing the Lord to lead me out of a professional dancing career in my early 20's (quite early), and embarking on teaching, the results far exceed anything I could plan myself.

Now through creating Living Dance International curriculums drawn as a distillation of the world's leading training methods I experienced (predominantly Rosella Hightower's) and my teaching career of 40+ years; and co-choreographing with the Lord 'at my shoulder' expressive sections of Christian content, it is influencing 1,000s of young dancers and dance teachers around the world.

Beth Bluett Spicer