

**IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMATION WITHIN
THE PLAYHOUSE DANCE COMPANY
1993 - 1997**

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Drama Department, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

by

TAMMY MARGUERITE BALLANTYNE

February 1998

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the principles and policies underlying the need for transformation within the Playhouse Dance Company (PDC) in Durban and the actualities of implementing these visions and procedures. It is proposed that artistic structures, ideals and processes cannot remain impervious to the climate of change. Alterations in the political arena demand radical permutations within arts councils and their concept of repertoire, educational programmes and training. Transformation is linked to the problem of identity and it is suggested that the company is in the midst of a journey towards “becoming” rather than “being”.

Chapter One comprises an overview of changing trends in the arts globally and the impact on South African art forms and processes. There is also an examination of the past, the establishment of arts councils and the colonial heritage of the dance companies within these councils. The formative years of the NAPAC Dance Company and the strategies formulated by former artistic directors have, it is suggested, hampered the transformation process.

Chapter Two focuses on the PDC’s endeavours to transform between the years 1993 and 1997. Lack of funding, conservative public tastes and training processes are all issues confronting management, choreographers, educators and performers in attempting to provide a clear direction towards transformation. The company walk a tightrope as they struggle to balance the heritage of their artistic past while giving birth to a new heritage for the future.

Chapter Three discusses two areas that reveal measurable attempts at transformation. Hawkins offers re-inventions of the classics which encourages innovation, and Siwela Sonke was conceived to draw on dance forms located in Kwazulu-Natal in the search for a South African dance aesthetic.

Chapter Four investigates whether transformative visions are becoming a reality and suggests how the company could extend the process further. This chapter concludes with ideas about the nature of culture and how this informs the exercise of transformation.

This thesis proposes that transformation within the PDC is occurring even though it has its shortcomings. The main thrust of the research is to investigate, identify and document factors that are contributing to current dance trends in Durban.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
 CHAPTER ONE	
<i>EXPANDED HORIZONS:</i>	
SHIFTING CLIMATES AND THE DEMAND FOR CHANGE.....	9
1.1 Global shifts in the arts.....	9
1.2 Moving towards transformation : S.A. arts in flux.....	12
1.3 Heritage and tradition.....	13
1.4 Transposing the European original.....	15
1.5 Early days : the colonial legacy.....	15
1.6 NDC 1985 - 1993 : classical and then some.....	18
1.7 Evaluation, transition and implementation.....	23
 CHAPTER TWO	
<i>NEW DIRECTIONS:</i>	
THE RESPONSE TO CHANGE AND THE BALANCING ACT.....	26
2.1 A marketable image.....	27
2.2 Ringing in the changes.....	28
2.3 Cutting their coat to fit the cloth.....	30
2.4 Reaching out : new (and old) perspectives.....	32
2.5 A hurdle of arrogance and ignorance : the audience dilemma.....	38
2.6 Re-learning roles : transformation of the mind.....	39
2.7 Training = ballet.....	40
2.8 Travelling towards trans-FORM-ations.....	42
2.9 A thumb-print vs. a re-print for PDC.....	44
2.10 A handful of seasons : expanding in new directions.....	45
2.11 Authenticate or re-invent : familiar forms in contemporary dressing.....	47

CHAPTER THREE

KICK-START FOR SURVIVAL:

METHODS FOR METAMORPHOSIS.....	51
Critique of <i>The Sylph : She 's dancing as fast as she can</i>	51
<i>And then [they]blew in</i>	63
3.1 Mission : to cross to a new place altogether.....	63
3.2 Routes to an identity.....	65
3.3 Street-wise dialogues : out-reaching.....	65
3.4 More audience troubles.....	67
3.5 Conceptual training : a multi-cultural language.....	68
3.6 Ahimsa Ubuntu : a “choreographic charter”.....	71
3.7 Testimonies to our past and present.....	72

CHAPTER FOUR

FORGING AHEAD *WITH ATTITUDE*:

REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMATION.....	76
4.1 Visions put into practice.....	76
4.2 Taking transformation further.....	78
4.3 Re-directing thoughts on culture.....	83
 CONCLUSION: Back to basics.....	 85

APPENDICES

A: Extracts from interviews.....	88
B: Repertoire of the PDC.....	98
C: Newspaper articles.....	101

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	104
--------------------------	------------

PREFACE

I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Gary Gordon, for his encouragement and input.

I am deeply indebted to the Grahamstown Foundation for their financial support.

Many, many thanks must go to the wonderful people at the Playhouse Company, and others who were interviewed, for listening patiently, answering articulately, faxing promptly and giving willingly.

A special tribute to:

the unflappable Barbara who e-mailed, printed and supported constantly

Tanya and Genevieve, two dear friends and kindred spirits

Fran for her wise long-distance advice

Roger for his generosity of spirit and wonderful computer

my mother and sisters who lived, loved and suffered with me,
and a father who has been my inspiration and nurtured in me a love of the arts and
dance in particular

and finally

to Brad, for his love and patience and to whom this thesis is dedicated.

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development, (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.

INTRODUCTION

In 1991 Albie Sachs, a prominent member of the ANC, gave a lecture at the Winter School as part of the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. His writings, and access to them, had been banned for so long that his remarks took on great significance and meaning for all South Africans. His paper deals with the issue of identity and opening out to different cultures:

When I look at you, at the people in this hall, what do I see? Who are you, who am I, who are we? I am one of millions of South Africans for whom everything we hold dear is about to open up, while I fear that for many of you everything you most cherish seems about to close down. Can we speak to each other? (1991 : 3)

He is speaking of change, a word that for many people has connotations of insecurity and fickle transition. Then and now South Africa is in a state of flux concerning the arts and the buzzword that is bandied about is multi-culturalism¹. Art forms that symbolise the so-called elite such as opera, ballet and music, which have upheld the Western aesthetic, are in danger of losing a place in the New South Africa.² There is a move, correctly, to afford indigenous art forms - South African creations - the respect they deserve. And always there is the danger of creating another exclusive system to replace the one before. Ideally, an atmosphere of inclusiveness and openness is most desirable. Where does this leave the **Playhouse Dance Company**³ in Durban, Kwazulu-Natal that for many years has been a part of the so-called

¹ All references in the text to multi-culturalism do not intend to evoke the "melting-pot" scenario. Instead it is used in the context of understanding, becoming familiar with and appreciating the diverse cultures we have in South Africa, in an attempt to create an **inclusive culture**.

² The word elite has been ascribed to these forms because they have traditionally been art forms that are expensive to mount and have therefore been perceived as pastimes that can only be enjoyed by the monied and privileged. In this country the white minority has rooted its idea of culture as beginning and ending with these art forms and has been historically the only sector of the population to have access to them via the arts councils.

³ Hereafter the Playhouse Dance Company will be referred to as the PDC.

eurocentric tradition? How do the dancers themselves re-constitute their roles in this time of flux?

Part of the struggle that the PDC interacts with daily is the problem of **identity**, the need for a recognisable blueprint. A sense of identity can be perceived as a prime source of security. Stuart Hall's discussion on identity is helpful. He makes the point that the traditional or recognisable meaning of identity is "...an all-inclusive sameness..." (1996 : 4) He goes on to say that "identities are constructed through, not outside, difference." (Ibid) It is only through the relation to the Other that an identity is constructed. He urges a reconsideration of definitions that propound the desirability of sameness and exclusion. Yvette Hutchison argues for "access to rather than ownership of": inclusion as opposed to exclusion, so that art forms can continue to be enriched by exposure to each other. It follows that what the PDC seeks is to retain the tradition as well as to be open to experimentation and innovation.

The PDC is an example of a dance company that is required to "wear many hats"⁴ in the quest for survival: teach, perform, choreograph, tour. Couple this with the Durban public's perception of what a dance company should be and the type of work *they* think it should be doing, and it becomes less easy to attach a label. Andrea Moller, former publicist for the Playhouse Dance Department, refers to the fact that the PDC is the only dance company the majority of theatre-going audiences in Kwazulu-Natal recognise. She found the issue of identity problematic, outlining her reasoning as follows:

...the public would like them to be a classical dance company because those are the kinds of work that get supported. They did a season in Pietermaritzburg in March that included excerpts from *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Giselle*... But when they do things like *Kick-Start*, the same audiences are just not interested. (Personal Interview, April 1997)

⁴ Interview conducted with Gita Pather, Strategic Planning Manager for the Education and Development Department at the Natal Playhouse, 1997. She will always be referred to as Gita Pather so as not to confuse her with Jay Pather.

Julie Peters argues that people adopt or align themselves to particular and specific artistic and intellectual activities that have static boundaries. This is the predominant understanding of “culture” by the majority of white South African theatregoers. The view from their insular citadel of elitism permits no fluctuations in a controlled landscape and familiar unchanging environment. Peters suspects a danger here:

To suggest that cultural identities are fixed is to suggest that the cultural inheritances that make up those identities are equally fixed: that we cannot change the material that we have inherited. (1995 : 199)

Margaret Foyer comments that apartheid was “a tragedy for all population groups” (Dance Europe, (DE), 1997 : 42) and “left a legacy of cultural arrogance and ignorance” (Ibid) amongst the white population. Notoriously conservative in their tastes, Durban audiences long for a continuation of the canon and assiduously resist contemporary work and its content that is often issue-based and confrontational. Little thought is given to the economic constraints that the PDC is facing and the fact that the classics require vast sums of money to mount⁵. Sachs’ wry observation is pertinent:

...how little true cultural rights mean to the majority of whites in this country, and how much their white-ness signifies. I feel the people I am speaking to are 10% Afrikaner, or Jew, or Portuguese, or English, and 90% white. They are far more worried about their swimming pools and pensions than they are about Van Wyk Louw, or Buber, or Camoes, or even the Beatles. (1991 : 2)

In terms of dance in South Africa, ballet has been upheld as the only or most desirable technique. Nineteenth century classics have remained the cornerstone against which all other forms of dance are measured. The PDC remains ballet-based in its training and, to a certain extent, mind-set. Yet over the years they have offered works that could be termed as contemporary and given scope to South African choreographers such as Robyn Orlin, Boysie Cekwana and Christopher Kindo. With the numbers reduced to eight permanent members,

⁵ Refer to Appendix A, p.91 for pertinent remarks by Hawkins (1997).

they have had to be resourceful as the “great” classics cannot be mounted with so few. The dancers have been challenged to re-define their status all the time, to **transform**.

The term **transformation** refers to the idea of metamorphosis and the need to change existing structures. The question could be asked, does transformation mean to alter irrevocably, to retain no trace of a former self? Or is it a process whereby the “good” is weeded out from the “bad”, some of the old is meshed with the new? In the words of Albie Sachs, “art is the enemy of definitions” (1991 : 1) and attempts to arrive at any clear-cut definitions are often futile. For the purposes of this discussion, however, the following ideas on transformation are helpful.

Nicky du Plessis, former dance publicist and education officer at NAPAC, attempted to clarify the use of the word “transformation” as it is used in relation to arts and culture. She placed it in its historical and political context:

It seems to belong to a particular time. It was very much linked to that time before our first democratic elections when it was clear that funding was going to shift; content, structure, audiences were all going to shift across a political level which was going to impact on social and economic aspects. I think that this meant that a place such as a PAC [performing arts council] under government subsidies would have to undergo some sort of transformation to be in line with the new dispensation.

(Personal Interview, May 1997)

Du Plessis elaborated further on what transformation meant for NAPAC. It was about trying to create a structure that would best serve the new dispensation in terms of the following:

- ~ utilisation of resources: should there be permanent performing companies or merely provision of venues for groups of artists moving in and out?
- ~ audience development: which sectors of the population are being encouraged to attend the theatre and is there sufficient audience education?
- ~ economics: how will it be possible to balance the funding equally?

Jay Pather⁶ sees the process of transformation as a challenge:

With the kind of President and the constitution we have, we have the power, with very specific briefs to take up the challenge. It is about not fearing the *new*, about not fearing the possibility of all kinds of things happening. It is the seeking out of things that are going to develop over time, not the *quick-fixes*. It has to be *organic*. In the past we had a *formula* because we knew the audience and we would do something appropriate. I am sure those audiences are still around but there is fertile ground with the newer audiences.

(Personal Interview, May 1997) [My emphasis]

A paragraph in the final report of the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) places transformation of the arts in another context, one of irrevocable change:

Transformation necessitates radical change, which is feared by those wishing to protect vested interests, as well as by those who fear risk. If arts education is to thrive, it is essential that the process of change be creatively initiated and efficiently managed, which will require ongoing evaluation. It must be acknowledged that change will not take place until the process is owned by all participants. (ACTAG, 1995 : 267)

It is within an understanding of these complex and differing sentiments that this thesis will present a case study of the PDC between the years 1993 and 1997 to discover and examine the extent of change within that time period. It is important to note that the transformation process is an ongoing voyage. The discussion will be framed by Hall's observations that identities are "increasingly fragmented and fractured" (1996 : 4) and that:

...identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of *becoming* rather than *being*...a coming-to-terms-with our '*routes*'. (1996 : 4) [My emphasis]

⁶ Pather currently holds the post of Artistic Director of the Playhouse's newest dance company, Siwela Sonke. He was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to read for a Masters Degree in Theatre and Dance at New York University. In 1992 he was appointed Resident Choreographer for CAPAB's Jazzart. He has also taught at the Universities of Durban-Westville, Zululand and Cape Town and has co-ordinated various dance theatre programmes as well as performing in such productions as *Journey*, *Medea* and *Stories I could Tell*. He will always be referred to as Pather.

Chapter One consists of a brief foray into changing trends in the arts world-wide and how these are impacting on the South African arts scene. It proposes that the idea of belonging to the “global village” has allowed greater access to a “crossover culture”:

...in the post-colonial era, it's no longer possible for Western artists and intellectuals to regard the Third World as a paradisiacal pocket of purity and authenticity. In the breakdown of cultural barriers and the interpenetration of peoples and manners, dance traditions change at an accelerated pace. (Copeland, Dance Theatre Journal, (DTJ), 1992 : 43)

In South Africa there is a return to feelings of nationalism which have spurred on writers, artists and performers to explore forms that were suppressed, in an atmosphere of openness and sharing. There is a bid to South Africanise productions and artworks; not by throwing in little offerings of so-called ethnic or indigenous performance rituals but by wholehearted attempts to create an aesthetic that can truly be called South African. Dance has been influenced by the post-modern developments occurring throughout the world: eclecticism and deconstructing previously accepted norms and practices are the order of the day.

The springboard for these explorations has come from the policy documents on arts and culture drawn up over the last few years. These documents concentrate on appreciating the diversity of cultures and redressing imbalances.⁷ This has ultimately meant a decrease in financial aid for the arts councils who have subsequently had to enter into a dialogue with transformation, re-assessing processes and content of productions.

⁷ The term “culture” has undergone tremendous scrutiny and the Draft White Paper has sought to open out the meaning somewhat from the narrow sense that was historically ascribed to it by South Africa's white government and slavishly followed by the white population. The arts councils were deemed to be hallowed places of culture and engendered separation and exclusivity. Transformation has inspired a more inclusive vision. Chapter 1, Point 12 of the Draft White Paper states:

“Culture refers to the dynamic totality of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features which characterise a society or social group. It includes the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, heritage and beliefs developed over time and subject to change.”(1995 : 10)

The first chapter also affords a retrospective examination of the past. Factors such as the establishment of ballet companies and emphasis on classical training as a pre-requisite to entering a company; artistic directors, moulded by education and experience gained overseas; and their attempts to market the dance company in the same tradition as British ones have all informed the nature of the PDC. It is these limitations that all involved with the PDC are attempting to overcome on their journey towards transformation .

Chapter Two chronicles and discusses the PDC's response to change during the years 1993-1997. Their aspiration of being more in tune with an altering milieu has meant a broadening of educational and outreach work. This research shows such developments to be a positive step towards change. However, the dancers' training processes are limiting and still need fundamental reforms. Attention is focused on administrative policies, decreased funding and the sad lack of nourishment by an audience as being major factors in the transformation game. The discussion is placed within a framework inspired by Marshall Berman's suggestion that shifting climates demand the need "to be both *revolutionary* and *conservative*: alive to new possibilities for experiences and adventure,..." (1983 : 13) [My emphasis] The balancing act is a precarious one.

Chapter Three comprises an examination of two areas that exhibit a real opening out within the dance department. Transformative triumphs have manifested themselves in Mark Hawkins' (Artistic Director) re-inventing of the classics in a bid to introduce more modern work to a staid Durban public. A critique of one of his works is offered as an example of these endeavours to re-constitute our inheritances. The other survival tactic has been the creation of

a second dance company, **Siwela Sonke**⁸, which has pledged itself to utilising the dance forms found in Kwazulu-Natal in an effort to conceive a truly South African dance aesthetic.

Chapter Four reflects on the extent of the transformation process and whether visions have indeed become a reality. A consideration is given to ways in which the process could be taken further, bearing in mind that money is a key factor in initiating new projects. The Moving Into Dance Company is used as an example of what can be achieved through a lasting commitment to researching, respecting and re-creating diverse dance forms and cultures.

Finally this research finds its purpose in investigating, identifying and documenting factors which are contributing to current dance trends in Durban. The PDC stands as an example of a company faced with enormous challenges, the most fundamental of these being the need to marry a vision with the practical necessity of survival.

⁸ Siwela Sonke was a joint initiative set up by the Playhouse Company's Education and Development Department and Dance Department in 1994. The project aimed at extending the Performing Arts Council's dance language with a focus on the dance styles and traditions of Kwazulu-Natal. Alfred Hinkel from Jazzart created the initial programme and in 1996, Jay Pather became the new Director/Teacher. In 1997 Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre was launched as a second dance company with nine permanent members.

CHAPTER ONE

EXPANDED HORIZONS⁹

Shifting climates and the demand for change

Before embarking on a discussion of transformation within the PDC it is important to establish this within the larger context of global transformation and its impact on South African dance.

1.1 Global shifts in the arts

There have been many external influences that have contributed to a global shift in the arts and which have subsequently had a ripple effect in South Africa. Hauptfleisch identifies “the pervasive influence of the international communications media...” (1992 : 164) through which other cultures have been opened up to the world at the large. With the advent of the Internet has come the concept of the ‘global village’. Roger Copeland cites an amusing anecdote about a famous African art scholar on a recce to Zaire. Witnessing a man performing a dance “that bore a striking resemblance to the Electric Boogie” (Copeland, DTJ, 1992 : 42), the scholar asked the man eagerly how and where he had accessed the steps, convinced that he would discover the “authentic African ‘roots’ of the dance.” Thanks to MTV, the man had copied Michael Jackson. As Copeland says: “In the global village, questions of purity and authenticity are up for grabs.”(DTJ, 1992 : 42)

⁹ The titles of each chapter are taken from various dance seasons at the Playhouse between the years 1993 and 1997: *Expanded Horizons*, March 1993; *New Directions*, November 1993; *Kick-Start*, July 1996; *With Attitude*, February 1997.

South Africa has become a part of this global community after many years of isolation. For this reason art forms here are being influenced by trends in other countries and vice versa. This is identified as 'crossover culture' by Hauptfleisch who comments that:

[Syncretism] is seen as a natural and almost inevitable aspect of the kind of multicultural and multilingual society we have in South Africa, flowing from the artists' ongoing search for new and exciting forms and techniques, and the socio-cultural impact of their constant exposure to an immense variety of stimuli - from Africa, Europe, America and the East... (1992 : 163)

Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei articulately expounds on this idea of 'cross-fertilization': "...it is ultimately the artist's responsibility to allow herself to be influenced by every stimulus she encounters." (Contemporary Theatre Review, (CTR), 1994 : 131) Speaking from an American perspective, Sorgenfrei is concerned with the debate on multiculturalism, herself inspired by Asian styles of performance. She offers pertinent insights:

Multicultural work is good and necessary on artistic grounds; it is good and necessary on educational grounds. It allows students or audiences to experience a world of possibilities, to expand their vision, to explore new ideas, alien concepts...tastes will expand. Such results will not hurt the proud and glorious traditions of Western civilisation. (CTR, 1994 : 134)

There has also been a return to the feelings of nationalism and ethnic loyalties in Europe and elsewhere. Here in South Africa we are trying to redress the imbalances of the past and accommodate all our differences fairly. Everywhere the old ways of viewing culture are being questioned. In 1991 Albie Sachs spoke about the function of the Bill of Rights:

It helps us to South Africanise ourselves, to discover the full and rich dimensions of our country. It recognises the drummer in the rural homestead as it does the tympanist in the symphony orchestra, the dancer at the wedding ceremony and the ballerina on the stage.
(1991 : 3)

Here the term multi-cultural embodies another meaning, what Carl Wolz¹⁰ calls "a mixed cultural context...a mosaic or patchwork quilt of different groups, generally preserving their individual

¹⁰ Carl Wolz has been a major influence on cross-cultural exchange throughout Asia and the Pacific Rim.

identities.” (1995 : 99) But this does not eliminate a sharing and borrowing from each other. Wolz suggests that diverse cultures can meet and that a cross-cultural education teaches a respect for other traditions.

There has also been the blossoming of the use of eclectic sources when creating artworks. Deconstructing the past and re-creating the present has contributed to what we term “post modernism”. Although this is a contentious term, as many people feel that South Africa did not even experience the facets of modernism, it is clear that post modernist influences and ways of working have filtered into the bloodstream of the arts community in South Africa. In the realm of contemporary dance, companies such as **Jazzart** and **The First Physical Theatre Company** have been consciously working in a different mode and experimenting with other processes in creation, form, content and training.

Peter Brinson came to South Africa from Britain (where vast strides have been made in terms of dance development and the challenges that change demands) in 1993 to expound on his notion of *Dancepower*. This is understood to mean “the collective voice of the whole dance world within a nation.” (Brinson, 1993 : 5) Dance is the most marginalised of all the arts all over the world.¹¹ It is not only here that funding for dance is minimal. Brinson maintained that dance could only attain its rightful place if political pressure in the form of lobbying took place. In 1993, a National Dance Consortium in Britain was set up to allow people involved in dance forms across the spectrum to have a platform for discussion and lobbying. In the same year in South Africa the National Arts Initiative (NAI) was set up to address issues such as funding for dance and to assess the dance needs in each centre around the country.

¹¹ Particularly pertinent to dance development in South Africa are issues noted in the National Arts Initiative: that Education Departments give little or no attention to Dance Education, and “the present notion of dance in South Africa is culture-specific and prioritises classical ballet.” (1992 : 3)

Jeannette Siddall wrote about the Ontario Arts Council's guide to lobbying for the arts. She suggests that there is a resistance world-wide to mixing art with politics, yet this has proved an effective method, in other spheres, of gaining attention. She quotes the conclusion to the guide as a message to the dance community in Britain:

"Lobbying is an integral part of the democratic process...There will always be people pushing the government to decrease or eliminate public arts funding. We must push back, and not get discouraged. We cannot criticise the government for failing to meet our expectations, if we do not effectively communicate our changing needs and aspirations to the decision-makers." (DTJ, 1993/1994 : 21)

In the Draft White Paper, Chapter Six deals with International Cultural Co-operation. Point Ten succinctly states:

Africa is faced with the challenge of re-establishing itself within a rapidly changing global environment. The rich and diverse traditions of African arts, culture and heritage and their contribution to the development of world culture is universally recognised. The Ministry's policy on relations with Africa will be based on fully reintegrating South African culture with that of the continent [and the world]. (1995 : 40)

1.2 Moving towards transformation: South African arts in flux

With the release of Mandela at the beginning of a new decade the atmosphere was ripe for change and transformation. The build-up to the 1994 elections brought promises of liberation and new thinking. The political ramifications of restructuring have not escaped the arts. Indeed the arts welcomed a chance to commit to the process. Several important documents have been drawn up in the last few years detailing the role of arts and culture in a new South Africa. Dr. B.S. Ngubane, Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, in his message in the Draft White Paper, introduces the context of change:

South African society has been undergoing fundamental transformation over the last two years. In accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, non-racism and non-sexism, every sector of our society is facing change. While this may be unsettling for some, for many, it brings hope that our needs, views and aspirations will now also become part of the mainstream. (1995 : 2)

Margaret Foyer also describes the transitional period in which the arts in South Africa find themselves:

The arts in South Africa, like everything else, are in a state of flux. Redress is the big issue and the European art forms, which were previously the only beneficiaries of state subsidies, are having to make cuts while more money goes to supporting indigenous culture.
(DE, 1997 : 42)

Various policies have outlined the prominent needs for integration, multiplicity, embracing wholeness and “a commitment to correcting historical imbalances in the distribution of skills, resources and infrastructure in the sphere of the arts.”(NAI, Resolution 1 : 1992) In terms of dance the NAI further states that:

It is imperative that a dance conceptualisation is not enforced but evolves through a recognition and exploration of multifaceted forms and contexts...Dance in South Africa should be recognised as an all encompassing collective which allows for *rich and diverse dance expressions*. (1992 : 4) [My italics]

1.3 Heritage and tradition

Shifting climates often demand a radical change of direction. Political transformation necessitates similar permutations in artistic structures. Jay Pather, now Durban-based Artistic Director of Siwela Sonke, recognised that old establishments were stagnating:

Cultural institutions sustained by and located in the economic infrastructures of the state only serve to reinforce dominant attitudes when they liberalise the peripheries of their work while maintaining intact elemental aesthetics and training processes that maintain the status quo. (Dance Journal, (DJ), 1990 : 2)

In order to examine the PDC's attempts to transform, it will be essential to refer to the old NAPAC, and in particular, the establishment of ballet companies in South Africa. Furthermore, a retrospective study of the NAPAC Dance Company pre-1993 is vital to the investigation into attempts at transformation.

In 1963 the Performing Arts Councils came into being with a prime concern to promote and foster ballet, opera, theatre and music. The focus was eurocentric and the target market the

white minority, or the small theatre-going minority within the white minority.¹² The institutions themselves were situated within urban or city areas thus effectively cutting off accessibility to other races:

The architects of apartheid saw cultures as bounded, fixed, homogeneous entities. They emphasised the differences between people and reified cultural traditions. The preservation of traditional culture as discrete entities, frozen in time, was in keeping with their policy of racial exclusiveness. (Glasser, DJ, 1990 : 10)

In the early days the companies had to tour to various centres - provincially and nationally - to perform, as there were no centralised theatres immediately. Potential audiences had been built up by the National Theatre Organisation since the early 1930s.

The arts councils were state-subsidised - meaning, in essence, that the government could dictate the artistic agenda and maintain firm control over the administrative duties. The subsidies themselves were not apportioned equally and only one-sixth came to Natal. NAPAC was granted a budget of R29 000 for the first period of operation, with which they were supposed to set up an administration and provide opera, ballet, drama and music performances.¹³ As early as 1965 there was concern at the fact that four councils had been established to service such a small population and even then financial constraints were an issue. In 1965 Dr. WJB Slater, the Vice-Chairman of CAPAB wrote:

We are expected to provide on a professional basis for the four expensive arts to a comparatively small population distributed in hundreds of towns and villages over an enormous area. To do this in a worthy manner is a costly task, however economically we carry it out. (Grut, 1981 : 196)

¹² Point 9 of the Draft White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage states:

“Where cultural institutions were deemed to serve audiences across the perceived racial divide, they were funded through the Department of National Education as a “General Affair”. Given the nature, governance, mandate and geographical location of the institutions funded by the DNE, they also primarily served white audiences.” (1995 : 13)

¹³ Malcolm Woolfson provides this figure in his unpublished history of the first thirty years of NAPAC, Pioneers and Pennies, (1993/1994 : 3).

1.4 Transposing the European original

In 1942 three soldiers wrote to a local newspaper:

“For one short evening we could imagine we were back in London watching the Vic-Wells - could there be a higher compliment to the Cape Town Ballet Club?...[It is] firmly based on first-class classical technique.”(Grut, 1981 : 138)

This illustrates the adoption of classical ballet that the colonies emulated. Sylvia Glasser, Artistic Director of Moving Into Dance, comments:

When the state-subsidised ballet companies were formed in the early 1960's, they were modelled on Western European prototypes. Although there were some forays into indigenous culture through the use of myths or stories, the form in which their material was expressed was still based on Western aesthetic criteria.
(DJ, 1990 : 9)

Only those dancers of the right complexion and in possession of the correct training were able to pursue professional careers within the arts councils. Tied up with this is the image of a ballet dancer that we are conditioned to perceive as the only ‘look’ desirable for a dancer: that of a thin, blonde ‘English rose’. Jay Pather remarks:

In South Africa these images are a hundred times more ridiculous than if you were in Europe or America since the majority of the bodies in South Africa don't look like that anyway.
(DJ, 1990 : 3)

1.5 Early days: the colonial legacy

This discussion attempts to plot the past as a means of accessing the extent of the transformation of the PDC. It places the dance company's early days in a context of rigid, definable, known parameters and limits. In the 1960s, the dance company's identity belonged to a specific historical and traditional discourse borrowed from a Western model.

In 1964, Ballet Natal came into being with seven performances for schools. The name of the company testifies to their narrow field of reference. Clearly, ballet was to be the focus and the classical ethos informed their identity - their “naturally-constituted unity.” (Hall, 1996 : 4) Many

of the committee members were ballet teachers who had come out from England. The first ballet performed was *Les Sylphides* in May 1964 with guest artists from Johannesburg. The repertoire concentrated mainly on classical ballets, some early productions being *Wedding in Aragon*, *Apollo* and *Peter and the Wolf*. CAPAB toured to Durban with *Swan Lake* and Pact brought *Giselle* in 1967. In 1968 Ballet Natal became NAPAC Ballet and until its demise in 1976 produced such ballets as *Coppelia*, *Giselle* and *Sylvia*. There were very few attempts at creating new works during these years. Paco Morell's *Love the Magician* and Kay Connett's¹⁴ *Salutare* in 1973, added to the sparse repertoire but utilised the classical ballet style.

Dudley Davies'¹⁵ last production was *The Firebird* in 1975. For the first time, taped music was used: a sign of financial strain as normally the Durban Symphony Orchestra accompanied performances. The final two ballets under the banner of NAPAC Ballet were original works by Geoffrey Sutherland: *Gemini* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. *Gemini*, a rock ballet, spurred on **Natal Witness** critic David Coleman to liberal praise:

“Given its head, NAPAC Ballet has revealed a long suspected potential. Too long saddled with simplified carbon copies from the standard repertoire, it has at long last emerged as a vigorous, zestful group of young dancers.” (Grut, 1981 : 317)

It is interesting to note two things here. Coleman, still writing for the newspaper in 1997, in contrast to the above sentiment made over twenty years ago, is presently the loudest in voicing his aversion to PDC's contemporary work while mourning the death of the classics. Woolfson notes too that while Geoffrey Sutherland was in Johannesburg for a short time during rehearsals for *Gemini*, his modern choreography was tampered with, and on his return the cast proudly displayed a more classical version of his steps. This revelation will gain resonance in the next

¹⁴ Connett was principal dancer for many years with NAPAC Ballet.

¹⁵ Davies was Artistic Director from 1968 until the demise of the company in 1976. He was born in the Transvaal and was trained by Dulcie Howes and Cecily Robinson among others. He was a member of Johannesburg Ballet Theatre and was accepted to Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet in London. Davies returned to South Africa in 1956 and taught at UCT Ballet before moving to Durban.

chapter as some of the dancers in the PDC still resist learning works that are more avant-garde, such as Robyn Orlin's controversial offerings.

Even more than twenty years ago there was dismay amongst the dancers at the lack of public support for ballet. In response to this NAPAC, tried to educate the younger generation with a demonstration of ballet for schools: Professor Elizabeth Sneddon, Head of the Speech and Drama department at Natal University, introduced certain programmes with a talk entitled "What is Ballet?" The history of ballet audiences in Natal show that there was very little demand for a Company, so there were no foundations to build upon. "It was unrealistic to think that, once money became available, a company could suddenly bloom and grow." (Grut, 1981 : 306) The existence of money was not, it seems, enough. Grut suggests that a tight group of dancers, or a good choreographer and a public is needed.¹⁶

South Africa, with its small theatre public, cannot hope to support four large ballet companies. Inevitably therefore, and sadly, the second company to close, after the Orange Free State's PACOFS Ballet was disbanded in 1971, was NAPAC Ballet... (Grut, 1981 : 306)

In 1967 a report to the board stated that a small company could not survive and was very costly to run. A suggestion was made that PACT and CAPAB service the ballet public's needs in Natal. It seemed that the company faced the problem of dancers coming and going and programmes could not be found to accommodate the small numbers.¹⁷ Financially the company could not cope. In a 1968 report, figures showed that over nearly three years the company cost close to R90 000 and their income was R10 000. In 1976, NAPAC Ballet ceased to exist until the **NAPAC Dance Company**¹⁸ was founded in 1985. Until that time PACT serviced the ballet

¹⁶ It is ironic that this suggestion was made as far back as 1981 and PDC is still struggling with all three of these factors.

¹⁷ It is pertinent to note that there was very little initiative taken in terms of creating new ballets for a small company. In 1997 a notable feature of the PDC is its capacity to make works for a reduced company.

¹⁸ Hereafter referred to as the NDC.

audience and Geoffrey Sutherland formed an *ad hoc* company which presented programmes for schools.

1.6 NDC 1985-1993: classical and then some...

Ashley Killar, Artistic Director of the fledgling group, ran the company along traditional lines and models of overseas companies. This was to be expected when one peruses Killar's background. He was trained at the Royal Ballet School and later Stuttgart Ballet and then danced and choreographed for Scottish Ballet and was a soloist at Sadler's Wells. He directed The National Ballet in Zimbabwe and became Ballet Master for PACT Ballet before moving to Durban.¹⁹ His classical heritage therefore informed the vision of the NDC.

Emphasis was placed on the nineteenth century classics such as *Coppelia* and *The Nutcracker*, but there was lasting commitment to twentieth century works and choreographers such as George Balanchine (*Apollo*, *Allegro Brillante* and *Sonatine*), Jack Carter (*Cage of God* and *Melodrame*) and Robert North's *Troy Game* to mention a few. The Arts Council now had substantial funding and a large company of some thirty dancers to facilitate the performance of major works²⁰. This was in stark contrast to the struggling NAPAC Ballet discussed earlier. An important point to make here is that the major focus and activity was the company, a rather exclusive, narrow foundation. Little choreographic experimentation or attempts to build on the European tradition ensued yet the name of the company suggested that it was not to be classically oriented but "dance" oriented.²¹ It remained impervious to cross-cultural contact.

¹⁹ In 1990, Killar spent a year as Ballet Master to Scottish Ballet and in 1991 became Artistic Director of Royal New Zealand Ballet and now directs the Ecole Classique Ballet School in Sydney.

²⁰ Refer to Hawkins (1996) and Gerard Samuels in Appendix A, pp.91 and 95 for further remarks on the NDC.

²¹ Janet Adshead warns that: "embracing the term "dance" may be misleading since it is either explicitly or implicitly almost totally concerned with modern theatre dance and fails to take account of the many forms of dance." (1981 : 72)

There were some early attempts to adapt to cultural shifts. Killar did attempt to promote South African choreography in the region. Dance forums, choreographic workshops, master classes and some contemporary dance seasons were hosted in the late 1980s where the works of the likes of Robyn Orlin (*Jump*), Sonje Mayo (*Soul of Africa*), Christopher Kindo (*Dans van die Reen*) and David Krugel (*After the Rain*) were performed. Yet few contemporary works became part of the active repertoire then and the focus during those years remained the reproducing of the classics and new modern ballets.

During Killar's time, he produced works such as John Cranko's *Lady and the Fool* (1986/1987) with Margaret Barbieri from Royal Ballet in the title role. His own version of *Romeo and Juliet* (1987) and the modern ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1989) are still part of the permanent repertoire. Remaining within a classical but innovative framework, works by Frederick Ashton and Balanchine featured strongly.²²

Notable milestones on the dance scene that contributed to an understanding of the need for change and adaptation were two programmes of Spanish and Indian dance and performances by the Phenduka Dance Company from the University of Durban-Westville in 1990. This was a breakthrough, as prior to this, members of Durban-Westville boycotted NAPAC.²³

From 1990 onward, there was a fair amount of community work, as twenty percent of the budget was allocated to this area. This displayed a shifting perception as to the role of a dance company in South Africa. A danced adaptation of Marguerite Poland's *Woodash Stars* toured

²² Killar was attempting to introduce audiences to the works of Balanchine and Ashton, two of the most revered classical choreographers of the twentieth century, who nevertheless stand as examples of revitalising the ageing, stale classical ballet.

²³ People involved with the now defunct Phenduka were instrumental in helping set up Siwela Sonke, hence this was where the ties were first established.

schools with a series of workshops in the communities; *Peter and the Wolf* was adapted and performed with Zulu narration; and performances of *Romeo and Juliet* were taken to black schools as it was their set work. Killar initiated two worthwhile projects that laid the foundations for the outreach work that PDC does now: “Check out Dance” for community dance groups and “Adopt a Dancer” project for training young dancers.

1991/1992 saw the arrival of a new director in the form of Garry Trinder from England.²⁴ He tended to follow the same lines that Killar had laid with more emphasis on twentieth century works with a classical bias. One major production was *Intro and Allegro* with three ballets by George Balanchine and Trinder’s own *Voices from God*.²⁵ A revival of Killar’s *Nutcracker* at Christmas time proved that Durban audiences favoured traditional full-length ballets.

A worthwhile change was the creation of NDC2 to service educational work in the schools and communities. Alfred Hinkel choreographed *Dance 4 U*, which incorporated African and Western styles of dance, giving the dancers at least a small inroad into dance forms other than ballet. Seeds were being sown, if haphazardly, for transformation to happen. Classes were held at the Playhouse and workshops in the townships. NDC2 had their own choreography season in the Loft in 1993 entitled *The Lab Project*. Members of the company also appeared in several Musical Theatre productions such as Geoffrey Sutherland’s *In Memoriam: Queen II*. Yet the ethos remained ingrained in a dance tradition borrowed from a continent other than our own. British

²⁴ Trinder was a member of Scottish Ballet from 1977-1982 where he also emerged as a choreographer. He also danced with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and London City Ballet. In 1986 he took up the post of Artistic Director of the Hong Kong Ballet and then came out to South Africa to direct NDC in November 1991.

²⁵ Information gleaned from Woolfson’s unpublished history shows that audiences were resistant to mixed bills. Mary Brennan, writing for *The Glasgow Herald*, urges readers to embrace rather than shun triple and quadruple bills. She writes that appreciation for the classics can be enhanced when:

there are other forms of expressive movement to offer contrast...speculate on the variety and range of dance[mixed bills] can provide at just one sitting, and of the advantages of being able to see so many dancers in roles that encourage them to give of their best. (Brennan: reproduced in the programme for *Expanded Horizons*, 1993)

cultural traditions have been the yardstick against which arts council dance companies have been measured. The NDC was fuelled by management styles and artistic policies that placed ballet as the penultimate technique and only desirable medium of training. Few South African choreographers became part of the repertoire, choreographic processes were linked to a classical base, and the company was made up of predominantly white dancers as dictated by the state. It is clear that under Killar and Trinder's leadership, the ethos was dictated by a more conventional and colonial approach that could be upheld with generous funding. The audiences remained enamoured with the classics and showed strong resistance to more contemporary work. Perhaps because of this it remained a safer option to produce work born out of a traditional mould²⁶.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the company itself was not fully equipped for, or committed to, transformation. Nicky Du Plessis did, however, describe certain attempts by Trinder to get in touch with a changing milieu:

He worked very hard to try and bring in an ethos of educational activity...He established NDC2 which was supposed to be the touring wing of educational dancers...He was committed in the sense that he fought quite hard for that to happen...He was eager to become aware of changes that were happening in the country. That was the time of the National Arts Coalition and National Arts Alliance. He would read the literature and discuss it. (Personal Interview, 1997)

Outlining her experiences in "an organisation on the brink of change", Du Plessis described numerous reasons for the company's failure to transform adequately. She pinpointed the division between management and workers and described the organisation as "hierarchical, disciplined...with parameters clearly delineated." (Personal Interview, 1997) NAPAC was made up of separate empires and there was little or no crossover between departments. KWASA²⁷ had

²⁶ For further remarks on this refer to Du Plessis in Appendix A, p.89.

²⁷ KWASA had been established in 1990 under the auspices of the Drama Department as a training programme for underprivileged performers who had been denied access to facilities and education in the performing arts. It was run along the same lines as Siwela Sonke, but was disbanded after approximately a year.

states, there was a “sense of trying to break out of the mould” even if the attempts at change did not always succeed. She does imply however that some of these attempts were merely for show, and that the commitment for actual implementation of change was hollow. She described a trip to England to research education work by dance companies. She returned with many ideas and recommendations:

I produced a long report...and nobody ever spoke to me about it ever again. Senior management never called me in and asked how do we take it forward and where do we go from here?...It was a clear indication of the lack of serious intent. They just wanted to say that I had gone and they had a report on it.
(Personal Interview, 1997)

ECON²⁹, a report of a different kind, had far-reaching consequences for the dance department and could not be ignored. It pinpointed NAPAC as an institution in dire need of restructuring if it intended to survive.

1.7 Evaluation, transition and implementation

The ECON report on the restructuring of NAPAC found that all the arts councils were facing grave financial difficulties because of a variety of factors: decrease in state funding, economic recession and civil unrest which had affected box office returns. Added to this, had been criticism levelled at the councils for catering to a largely white market. The NAI stated that:

...existing publicly-funded arts institutions, including training institutions, need to be thoroughly evaluated and transformed where necessary in the light of the artistic needs and aspirations of all South Africans. (1992 : Resolution 1)

The policies, couched in terms of growth, aspirations, independence, really just sweetened the bitter pill of “You’re on your own.” Greater independence meant simply: less money. The NAI further reinforced this: “...publicly-funded arts institutions...should not be dictated to or controlled by the state...”. (1992: Resolution 1) It was stated at the National Arts Coalition (NAC) that:

²⁹ ECON standing for the Evaluation Committee on NAPAC. This was instituted by Turnaround Management commissioned by the Durban City Council in March 1993 to investigate and recommend solutions to aid NAPAC in the restructuring process.

- a....the major art forms encouraged by the performing arts councils e.g. opera, ballet, classical music and theatre should continue to survive and grow in the future
- b. that it is possible for this to happen and support many other performing arts companies and groups without the resource-consuming structures of the performing arts councils
- c. that the resources enjoyed by the performing arts councils should be made available to as many performing arts workers and companies as possible, in all the regions (Dec. 1993)

Faced with the onslaught of these calls for re-evaluation and transformation, the final report of the ECON Committee reflected the following findings and objectives:

- Acknowledgement that NAPAC had made efforts to adapt to a changing climate but that these had been insufficient. Contributing factors had been "...outdated and misleading mandates and subsidy formulas, inflation, the economic climate and the relentless drumbeat of change." (Final Report ECON, 1993 : 1)
- The objectives straddled two main strands : opening the organisation to the entire Natal community and maintaining as many jobs as possible. ECON also recommended that the road to reform lay through development.

Acting on these recommendations the arts council referred to as NAPAC was renamed The Playhouse Company in 1994 and was relaunched with a new agenda. In 1991 Albie Sachs had recognised the need for cultural complexes to become a place for everyone:

Whether or not the Nico and the other ensembles of buildings should have been constructed, they are there and the problem is how to open them up rather than how to close them down. (1991 : 8)

The response to this desired transformation and opening up will be discussed in Chapter Two with an investigation into PDC's attempts to overcome the colonial inheritance that has been a part of its history. This chapter has prepared the way by mapping out the roots of the dance company and the forces that have shaped it, forces that placed British models at the core of a dance culture which did not open itself to cross-fertilisation and experimentation.

It is clear that these forces have shifted somewhat, as South Africa has become once again part of the global village. New thinking and documents sketching policies for an inclusive South African culture have impacted on arts structures and institutions. As Sachs demanded seven years ago:

We want an art that is vivacious and self-confident, that speaks in its own voice, that is prepared to take chances, explore the new while re-discovering the old.
(1991 : 3)

These ideas feed the route that the PDC is attempting to follow, a journey that includes adventure, but also caution. The scales hang continually in the balance as they interact daily with heritage and the unknown. The past was safe, traditional and recognisable; the present fluctuates constantly.

CHAPTER TWO

NEW DIRECTIONS

The Response to Change and the Balancing Act

THE PLAYHOUSE DANCE COMPANY 1993-1997

The process of transformation for the PDC appears to have been a difficult one. Lack of funding, conservative public tastes, the old Arts Council infrastructure and the training processes of the company are all issues confronting management, choreographers, educators and performers in attempting to provide a clear direction towards transformation. The Playhouse Dance Company walks a tightrope as they struggle to “preserve and maintain the heritage of an artistic past while creating the heritage of the future.”(Bull, 1996 : 38) Playhouse Company Director of Dance, Lynn Maree, expresses the complexity of the balancing act:

Right now it is unclear whether our survival depends on a readiness to offer our skills and our resources to the community, or a willingness to do *Giselle* or *Swan Lake* and persuade lovers of high culture to sponsor us, or to tour all over the country so as to qualify as a national organisation, or to tour diligently in our region so as to be seen as a regional resource. And until policies settle, and become reality, we think we had better do it all!
(DTJ, 1996 :17)

Mark Hawkins, speaking in an interview earlier this year, said that there is no set formula that the company is following, instead they seem to be guided by instinct. This, and Maree’s sentiments above, appears to be the new mission statement for the PDC. They can no longer work within the parameters laid down by the old policies and visions. New concepts have to be drafted and experimented with. In an interview with the **Sunday Tribune** in 1995,

Hawkins stated that the challenges facing the company were huge and that the major focus was on survival. Maree echoed his sentiments:

I have to find a position which I can live with which is punitive to neither group, to manage the first world and the third world in one community. And there are no guidelines, it is all being invented on the spot. (DTJ, 1996 : 17)

2.1 A marketable image

With the name change from NAPAC Dance Company to Playhouse Dance Company it was deemed necessary to make alterations to the administrative organisation and the marketable image of the company. Lynn Maree³⁰ became Dance Director while Mark Hawkins³¹ took over the reins of Artistic Director. Andrea Moller, in an interview, revealed that the department is still weighed down by bureaucracy in terms of a hierarchical structure of command and, for example, every media release having to be proof-read before being sent out. Moller indicated that this has an impact on human relations as there is a strong feeling that people are not entirely confident with one's work. The freedom to initiate projects is curtailed.

Although the dance company has always promoted contemporary and South African work, their image or identity has been strongly linked to the classical ballets in the repertoire. Hawkins maintains that because of this the public has become used to or favours purely ballet seasons. Research has identified that the names of seasons take on special meaning and have a great impact on potential audiences. Nicky du Plessis commented that Trinder had a very specific agenda for the identity of the company: it was sophisticated, elegant, polished and

³⁰ Maree's involvement in dance has been in the academic and funding areas. She has been on many boards in the U.K including the Education Council of the Royal Opera House.

³¹ Hawkins' professional dancing career began at CAPAB Ballet in 1983. Some of his appearances have been with London City Ballet and Hong Kong Ballet, as well as guesting for companies in Iceland and Japan. In 1994 he received the Nederburg Award for Ballet in Natal for the second time. Before becoming Artistic Director of PDC, he was a member of NDC.

refined. Some seasons during his term were called *Signatures* (June 1992), *Steps, Notes and Variations* (July 1992) and *Intro and Allegro* (October 1992).

Under the guidance of Maree and Hawkins the PDC is attempting to shift paradigms and update its image with the goal of appealing to a younger and different audience. This is in deliberate contrast to the strategies of Killar and Trinder. The Playhouse hosted a “rave” as a marketing exercise in 1997. It was used as a way of developing a new database for potential audiences for the dance company. Although the older generation of theatregoers might frown on such events, it did prove useful in opening up the Playhouse complex to events such as this. The dancers have also been involved in performing for the Durban Designer Collection (DDC). Perfect World, of DDC fame, stepped in to design the poster for PDC’s June season, *Kicking Air*. The design was provocative and eye-catching and the programme was presented in a paper bag. These novel ideas indicate a change in thinking and a desire to interact with the process of transformation. Other titles of seasons in the last three years offer a contrast to Trinder’s ideas of refinement and sophistication: *Explosion of Dance* (Sept. 1994), *With Attitude* (February 1996) and *Kick-Start* (July 1996). The ballet seasons however retain more conventional labels such as *Ballet Classics* (1993). Ann Nugent emphasises that marketing a product correctly is the key to success:

...naturally the finished performance and its sellable image has a crucial relationship with market forces. Venues know what their audiences like and structure their shopping lists and their advertising strategies, accordingly. (DTJ, 1996: 2)

2.2 Ringing in the changes

Recognising the need to adapt, one dance company became responsible for performance and educational work, and the brief of developing dance in Natal was noted as a top priority. Maree cites this as her vision for the dance department. Hawkins realised that

versatility was desirable in order to survive: he choreographs, teaches, administers and, on occasion, still dances, showing that a range of roles is necessary to adapt to a shifting climate. This interplay of roles occurs among the dancers as well, and can be seen as a positive transformative device. It displays an understanding of the need to deconstruct categories in attempts to open up to new possibilities; for example, a musical tribute in 1994, *Suite Sting*, fused songs with original choreography by members of the company. The dance department's Christmas show at the end of that year, *Unforgettable*, played to full houses. It was a celebration of song, dance and music, providing light, popular entertainment to balance the more serious, pure³² dance seasons. Hawkins elaborated that these productions are essential to enable the company to experiment with more contemporary work. They are dictated to by economic issues as well, such as the "bums-on-seats" policy. Here the safer policy of maintaining a balance is clearly evident: dance seasons which often lack support are saved by economically viable, commercial offerings.

Enlarging on this capacity to do a range of things, the company performs nationally and internationally; Basel, Hungary and India have been a few of their destinations. Mary-Ann De Wet³³, principal dancer with PDC, stressed that one of the reasons they tour so much is because the company do well wherever they go but in Durban, the general feeling seems to be that local is not good enough.³⁴

³² The term **pure** being used to denote programmes consisting only of dance.

³³ De Wet began her professional dancing career under the wing of Ashley Killar and the NDC. She has been a member of the dance company for eleven years.

³⁴ A headline that attracted attention in 1995 prefaced an interview with Hawkins in the **Sunday Tribune** after the PDC returned from their triumphant performances in Basel, Switzerland: *Out of step at home but in tune with the times*. This clearly indicated that the company was garnering support everywhere but in Durban where they needed it most.

Hawkins has also been able to engage the services of overseas choreographers such as Jean-Paul Comelin to lend diversity to the repertoire. This desire to remain in touch with world-wide trends and standards displays a certain amount of foresight; as Nugent points out: "Integrity cannot operate in a vacuum, and vision cannot exist in isolation from the practical side of survival." (DTJ, 1996 : 2) Gita Pather of the Playhouse Education and Development department is imbued with a shrewd business sense. Her philosophy rests on the continual pursuit of goals that are market-oriented. She believes that the dance company (and the other artistic departments) should "give people what they want and slip in everything else we think we're educating them with...artists must be there to challenge and provoke." (Personal Interview, 1997)

2.3 Cutting their coat to fit the cloth

With the restructuring of departments into more manageable segments in 1994, the Education and Development Department came into being. Previously two separate entities, education and development were united to establish the brief of nurturing the arts in KwaZulu-Natal. In terms of the dance company, two thirds of the budget is now spent on education and development. In the past the company has had the whole budget to spend only on itself. No longer is the dance company the sole focus of the dance department. Initiatives such as Siwela Sonke and projects that include the whole dance community - like hosting seasons of Indian dance - have been put into practice with a measure of success. This reorganising has been a positive and necessary step towards transformation. Gita Pather clarified the role of the Education and Development department:

There is a decided agenda where we're involved about influencing the artistic vision and direction of the Playhouse Company...we have a full-on effect about what this company [Playhouse] does and how it's doing it and the methodology. We were set up to *redress imbalances*. (Personal Interview, 1997) [My italics]

The dance company has also had to look for corporate sponsorship with the slashing of the annual budget. They have accepted work performing in the Miss South Africa pageant and at a launch for SAA. Here, money is earned for the dance department (although there is conflict as to who the money is spent on: Hawkins feeling that the funds should by rights go into the PDC, while others feel it should be siphoned into education or development projects such as Siwela Sonke).

Maree elaborated on the struggle to obtain funds. With talk of the arts councils being disbanded and a national arts council being established, funding is drying up:

...our budgets have been cut for three years in succession. If/when that dissolution happens, or we simply lack the funds to support dance activity, then both dance companies at present under my management will become free floating companies, free to apply for funds to that arts council...
(DTJ, 1996 : 17)

Lack of funding also plays an enormous role in the struggle for **artistic** survival and is a key factor in the transformation process. The repertoire has had to be restructured with short seasons of excerpts from ballets as well as contemporary seasons on offer. Their active repertoire³⁵ reveals a fair range of choreographers from Balanchine, Killar, Carter to Orlin and Cekwana. This attempt to balance the old with the new can be seen as a “conservative” policy, yet one that is perhaps needed at this time. The dance company has had to deal with the challenge of Durban audiences who yearn for the full-length classics and shun the more contemporary offerings. In 1993, a Durban dance teacher commented in a newspaper article that although she enjoyed the season, *Derivations* (July 1993), many people had not come because they prefer story ballets rather than the so-called “plotless ballets” of 20th century

³⁵ The PDC's full repertoire can be accessed in Appendix B, p.98.

choreographers. The final season of 1997 saw Hawkins' version of *The Nutcracker* play to nearly full houses in the Opera Theatre over the festive season.

2.4 Reaching out: new (and old) perspectives

A broadening of dance foundations has taken place in the educational work done by the dance department. With the dance budget weighted in favour of outreach initiatives, they have attempted to respond to the shifting cultural needs that blew in with the wind of transformation. Projects include:

- Programmes toured to schools, both primary and secondary.
- Evening and weekend classes offered to adults and children held in the studios at the Playhouse called *Steps into Dance*³⁶. PDC and Siwela Sonke members do the teaching.
- *Reachout*³⁷ involves some four hundred children every year in a performance on the Opera stage. In 1996 the dancers choreographed segments for different age groups and coached the students in excerpts from *The Nutcracker*. The project was initiated by Royston Muldoom³⁸, a dance educator from Britain, and has been running since 1994.
- Visits by Ed Salt³⁹, also a dance educator who runs workshops for children, teachers and community leaders.

³⁶ For further comments on these classes refer to Samuels, Appendix A, p.96.

³⁷ Refer to Appendix C, Article One, p.101 on *Reachout* 95.

³⁸ Muldoom trained at the Royal Ballet School and Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theatre. He has choreographed for major companies such as Scottish ballet, Northern Dance Theatre and Irish National Ballet. He then turned to working as an animator and promoter of dance, largely among young people with no dance background. He has mounted huge projects in many countries, one of them being a work with 250 able-bodied and disabled people at the Sheffield Special Olympics.

³⁹ Ed Salt hails from Britain and began his professional career as a primary school teacher. He then enrolled at the Laban Art of Movement Studio and became Advisory Teacher for Dance/P.E. After 11 years as a Primary Schools Advisor/Inspector and Dance Advisor, he took early retirement and currently works as a freelance dance/arts consultant. He has developed many dance in education programmes and courses; he designed Diploma courses for University of Warwick(1992) and University of Dublin(1992) and has developed teaching videos for dance.

Money has also been spent on building up opportunities for performance experience for children with special needs and disabilities as well as providing workshops for teachers who work with these children by specialist dance educators such as Jasmine Pasch from Britain.

Most of this work involves people with little or no formal dance training. The company is therefore providing “the means of empowering people and communities by developing dance creativity.” (Brinson, 1993 : 14) They are attempting to redress imbalances in training and the use of cultural facilities. The Playhouse building itself is being made accessible. As Sachs reminded us in 1991, the challenge that lay ahead was “how to open up” the cultural complexes not how to close them down. Carol Steinberg, writing in 1993, proposed that arts councils undergoing change “should incline at least in the short term towards favouring accessibility (and developmental needs) over excellence.” (South African Theatre Journal, (SATJ), 1993 : 20) The Playhouse Company appears to be fulfilling this goal.

Gerard Samuels⁴⁰, a dancer himself, has been instrumental in facilitating the effective running of the outreach programme, having personally experienced the problems inherent in such projects. Hawkins’ explained the nature of their educational programmes:

We need to be able to take education programmes which can be performed anywhere and we have had a certain degree of success, for example with Paul Datlen’s programme *Give and Take*. We have also put together things on the Transnet truck which is a performance space the dancers are familiar with. (Personal Interview, February 1997)

⁴⁰ Samuels was a member of the dance company from 1986-1994 and now holds the post of Dance Co-ordinator for the Education and Development Department. Hawkins and current company members deem his insight and input invaluable.

Samuels emphasised that since 1986 the company has been visiting schools, so this is not a new development:

However short-sighted it may have been to say “we’re this eurocentric company”, the attempt was still to educate and inform the broader community of what the dance company was all about. Our shift in recent years has been not to feel apologetic about the styles this company does.
(Personal Interview, June 1997)

There have, however, been a certain amount of changes in the content of their touring programmes; ranging from storytelling through dance, to reflecting various periods in the history of ballet, to programmes on the life of a dancer and finally, to the point now where short ballet pieces - such as an excerpt from *Sleeping Beauty* - are contrasted with contemporary South African work - such as Sonje Mayo’s *Soul of Africa*.

One does not doubt the good intentions and vision behind these programmes but it appears that they are not really fulfilling the needs of children who have no means to travel to a theatre and pay for a ticket, children who long for a little bit of magic to brighten their lives. The implementation of the tours is falling short of expectations. In an interview with Mary-Anne de Wet, she expressed a deep disappointment and frustration with the schools’ programmes:

What we’re able to take to a school is not exciting, it’s just not theatre. A lot of the dancers feel like this; that we would much rather the kids came to the theatre and experienced a performance and see the magic of it. It’s not magical at a school and it’s not magical for us to go there.
(Personal Interview, August 1997)

The dance company does host schools at the Playhouse for events such as *Omnibus*, which for the last three years has proved to be an outstanding success. Here the children experience a performance in the Opera Theatre with all the trappings: costumes, lighting, live music and atmosphere. But this event is not able to service those schools who cannot get there, be it due to transport problems or affordability. It also appears that the frequency with which the

company travels to the schools is lessening. Only one day a week is set aside for tours and even then they often do not go out every week. At a time in this country when cultural education is so crucial, this does not carry out the vision of “developing dance in Kwazulu-Natal” sufficiently.

De Wet remembers the time during Killar’s reign when they toured regularly but always to an area with a proper stage:

People were brought to a place like a community hall and we did quite hectic things: the Peasant pas de deux, all the Fairy solos in full make-up and full costume. We did *Peter and the Wolf* and we had different casts going off every day. (Personal Interview, 1997)⁴¹

This seems to be one of the major areas where the dancers are struggling to adapt: with money in such short supply everything has had to be scaled down and they are required to perform on a mat or sometimes just a bare floor. A vast amount of resentment has built up as often injuries are sustained and the dancers receive no enjoyment from the process. Yet, part of the joy for those children is the close proximity of the dancers, their immediacy. Moller commented that limitations are unavoidable when presenting classical works to schools; there will always be the problem of a platform or mat as the girls dance *en pointe*. Perhaps they need to simplify their performances and rethink how and what to present. The problem could stem from lack of identity, (“let’s do a little bit of this and a little bit of that”) and the programmes remain non-interactive and non-participatory. The effort is commendable but also directionless.

Transformation has also been difficult in the area of teaching. The company is trained as dancers, and with the restructuring have had to take on a task which has involved interacting with children with disabilities, with language barriers and with those who have

⁴¹ De Wet also recollected that the Junior Dance Company, which was established during Trinder’s reign, became responsible for touring. She sees this a viable option which betrays a mindset reared on the past; a time when money was abundant and readily available for such a project. It also revealed that a transformation of the mind has to take place as well as tangible restructuring of processes.

never danced before. Specialists such as Ed Salt have imparted skills and their attitudes have become more positive. Hawkins maintains that some of the dancers are still resistant to teaching, feeling that just because one studies dance does not necessarily mean one is going to, or wants to teach.

In response to the question of whether the dancers were adequately prepared for teaching, Gerard Samuels replied:

No, I think we can only hope that the sharing of them as professional dancers in a class environment, that's what is actually inspiring the child to come back and think "WOW". For us to think that by getting someone out for a short period of time, suddenly we're going to make someone into a fabulous teacher, is short-sighted. I don't think we have any blinkers on. I think teachers are born. (Personal Interview, 1997)

De Wet expressed the complexity of their dilemma: pre-1993, the dancers were not expected to teach so they have had to adapt to this need. Furthermore, even though specialists are brought in, somebody like Ed Salt teaches movement not ballet. It appears that the dancers were expected to teach Ed Salt classes as a component of their schools tours, but they resisted as they felt inadequate doing something they were not trained in. They wanted to teach ballet, a familiar and known entity. De Wet also added that the students who attend the *Steps into Dance* classes on Saturdays and *Reachout*, long to be taught ballet above every other dance form. These outreach initiatives give the dancers an opportunity to share their knowledge although there are still problems:

This way we could give the kids something. We want to try and build them up as dancers but it's still not actually working and it's not what we want. We would prefer to have one group of kids for a whole year...We would like to work with a smaller group and really send them somewhere. (De Wet, Personal Interview, 1997)

Despite the inherent hurdles that need to be overcome, this emphasis on teaching has been a positive response to change and is necessary for survival, both for the company and the dancers. Gita Pather urges us to see transformation in a context of "wearing many caps", of

being many things. The dancers from both PDC and Siwela Sonke are learning that the long-term survival of their art form depends on education and they are an inextricable part of the process.

Additional outreach projects that have invited adventure between the years 1993 - 1997 include: the hosting of several Indian dance programmes at the Drama Theatre annually; the establishment of a small cabaret company in 1993 where PDC members performed at launches, fashion shows and the like; and perhaps most importantly the hosting of the FNB Vita Dance Shongololo for the last four years. However, Adrienne Sichel remarking on this year's Dance Shongololo, felt that it was:

in danger of stagnation because development is happening in isolation, not only of a sustainable culturally representative audience, but of ballet studios and Indian dance...(Star Tonight, 1997c)

The Playhouse Dance Department has also been renowned for hosting visiting dance companies and in 1997 alone, Durban audiences were treated to performances by Jazzart, Bolshoi Theatre Ballet, Nederlands Dans Teater 2 and the St Petersburg Male Ballet. Typically, **Tonight** dance critic Debbie Hathway, summed up the year's dance highlights under the heading "It was a ballet good '97". Unsurprisingly, the ballet productions received the best patronage. The PDC is making strides by opening out the dance department to include work by companies other than themselves and by hosting a myriad of other dance forms they are exhibiting a willingness to share. By inviting children, students and adults from all communities to participate in the experience of dancing, the dancers themselves are offering a tangible and transformative contribution to the culture of learning South Africa's government so desires. Brinson's passionate writing on the value of the participative nature of dance provides an eloquent summation:

...the ambition of amateur performers, able or disabled, is not for pointed toes and perfect line but for *dance*, that is the communication through movement and music of personal emotions, feelings, relationships and ambitions...
(1991 : 111)

2.5 A hurdle of arrogance and ignorance: the audience dilemma

Hawkins spoke constantly of “changing the perceptions of an audience.” He admitted that there are some problems incumbent with new work but still desired that “audiences have opinions.” (Personal Interview, 1997) To facilitate the education of audiences - what Pather terms “dance literacy” - the company instituted open days that preview works for new seasons. Lecture-demonstrations and informal discussions held before certain performances were also put into place⁴². Although these do not garner the support they deserve, new works have been encouraging a younger generation of theatregoers. Hawkins commented in an interview for **Natal on Saturday** in 1994:

“We are always looking for new and younger audiences. We cannot continue to rely on a generation of middle-aged people brought up on the classics. We have to have a wider appeal than that. But obviously we have to create works they will want to see.” (Ballantyne, **Natal on Saturday**, 1994a)

There are attempts therefore to reach beyond class barriers and elitist structures, and to make dance more accessible, even though these occur within a restrictive economic framework that calls for a balanced viewpoint. On a positive note, the company are trying to break “the terrible distance between audience and the mysterious inaccessible dance...” (Pather, **DJ**, 1990 : 5)

Gerard Samuels added that throughout the entire entertainment industry audiences are waning. He is nevertheless optimistic as he expounded on remaining visionary and “gutsy”. His

⁴² Refer to Moller in Appendix A, p.92 for more comments on audience.

solution to the problem is : “Get the arts community that does support it to take ownership of our company and our theatre.”(Personal Interview, 1997) De Wet commented that all the dancers feel strongly about the lack of audience support. They are perplexed when a classical season is offered and badly supported. A shortage of money was offered as a potential source of the problem but she responded with:

I think it's a terrible apathy towards the arts. People want very much to have a eurocentric company, well they call it eurocentric which is nonsense, but they want it there but don't make the time or effort to support it. If a really crass play is put on, people will flock to it, even people who never come to the theatre. (Personal Interview, 1997)

2.6 Re-learning roles: transformation of the mind

An article in the **Mail and Guardian**, *Hell in a Tutu*⁴³, disclosed some shocking facts about trying to survive in a competitive dance environment. It prompted an enquiry into the state of affairs at the Playhouse. Are the PDC dancers allowed to have opinions and speak freely without fear of a hierarchy? How much of the transformation process has filtered into the mindsets of dancers and directors alike? Hawkins answered:

Things have changed here with regards to a more democratic atmosphere. The dancers are able to speak for themselves and have opinions. There is a downfall in that sometimes everybody can't agree but at least they can air their views. At Pact the dancers are dictated to. (Personal Interview, 1997)

De Wet corroborated on the opinion that this empowerment is a positive step towards transformation but she held reservations on how this “airing of views” worked in the studio:

The studio can only be an autocratic set-up, there's someone giving you work to do and you must do it. You can't backchat. That does happen a little bit now. Nobody wants to be treated like a child and some people feel like they are... You can't get touchy about it. If you empower your dancers too much, I don't know who's losing out. (Personal Interview, 1997)

⁴³ This article appeared in February 1997. PACT dancers spoke out about “abusive treatment” by senior management.

Yet one cannot help but acknowledge the ring of truth implicit in the following statement:

Dancers speaking for themselves it seems, is still a new and strange phenomenon needing more practice before it can be taken seriously.
(Siddall, DTJ, 1993/1994 : 21)

Hawkins stressed moreover that part of the transformation process was all about changing the arts' council mentality:

If we have to get somewhere, like Grahamstown, we have to bus it as there's no money to fly. Gone is the glamour. But because of their [the dancers'] willingness to do this and drive combis themselves, offers to perform all over the place have come in. (Personal Interview, 1997)

The members of the PDC are learning to adapt to the demands of a changing environment. Many of the dancers involved with the NDC and now the PDC, are arts council products and are having to re-learn their jobs. They are becoming adept at finding other ways to do things such as learning from video tapes because there is no money for a choreologist. The company, in other words, is being resourceful, which is the only route to take for survival.

2.7 Training = ballet

Turning towards a discussion of the company's training processes, it is revealed that **new directions** are needed here. Their classical technique informs much of their work in both form and vocabulary. Attempts to infuse a contemporary⁴⁴ feel into the choreography often only concentrate on content, or on a borrowing of steps and movements from other dance styles that are then pasted on to the ballet aesthetic. Ballet class every day also remains the norm⁴⁵. The answer lies not in rejecting the good technique that a ballet class provides but ensuring that it is not the only technique practised in the studio. Ann Nugent poses a question:

⁴⁴ Hawkins defines the term "contemporary" for his purposes as : "Work that is of now, dealing with subject matter pertinent to us and where we are now." (Personal Interview, July 1996)

⁴⁵ For further comments on training, see De Wet and Samuels in Appendix A, pp. 88 and 96.

...how relevant are the old values in a changing world?...Rules are there to be challenged, but a foundation technique is valuable if it brings the security of roots, so long as what is rooted is nurtured wisely.
(DTJ, 1996 : 2)

It is here where real transformation is lacking. In terms of training and rehearsal processes, the company is not truly opening out to unknown possibilities and experimentation. "Enforced training, based on imported ideas...have rendered the body shape more and more foreign."(Pather, DJ, 1990 : 4) For real and worthwhile transformation to occur, there is a need to be more brave and break away from the imposition of a learned technique. "Dancers trained traditionally tend to hump the form around like baggage in a suitcase, and knowing when to discard it so as to make space for new ideas can be a problem."(Nugent, DTJ, 1996 : 2)

It is necessary for the company to be experimenting with new aesthetics so that the term **dance** can be opened out and made more accessible. Jay Pather's insights are valuable to this end. As far back as 1990, he was practising and wrote about the need for democratic work processes that involve the following:

a dance technique that arises out of the natural inclinations of the body; learning and reworking the variety of dances that exist within the communities; taking them further as expressive, theatrical movement; using contact improvisation and other group building processes...allowing decisions to be made by the dancers and not just by the choreographer or director - all these ways will provide new directions. (DJ, 1990 : 4)

A process that has been underway for several years in the drama department at Rhodes University practically explores just such directions that contribute to re-defining the performer's role. Professor Gary Gordon, Head of the department, explained the value of including one's performers in such a process:

...it doesn't deal with a dictatorial process where the choreographer would come with the given vocabulary...There is an investigation, an interaction with a theme by the choreographer and the performers,...there's a dialogue...The focus is on each other,...(SATJ, 1995 : 99)

Herein lies the way forward for truly revolutionary transformation that will create thinking dancers who are vitally connected to the cultural and political shifts occurring in South Africa.

As Nugent points out:

...the education of a dancer ought to involve a broadening of the mind so that what is taught becomes not a narrowing by restraint, but a process of liberation and self-discovery. (DTJ, 1996 : 2)

2.8 Travelling towards trans-FORM-ations

It is fair to say though, that Hawkins does attempt to balance the classical training somewhat by utilising guest choreographers who work within more experimental frameworks and demand different processes. The traditional procedures for dance-making are deconstructed by the likes of Robyn Orlin and Boysie Cekwana, both of whom have works which feature in the company's active repertoire.

Orlin's work for the company has been a positive step into the relatively new (in this country) realm of performance art and dance theatre where the boundaries between theatre and dance are diminished. Her multi-disciplinary ethos focuses on fragmentation and transformation as opposed to linear progression. She imbues her work with filmic images that are resonant of the electronic media. This comes across strongly in her use of light in its various forms. An interpretation of her work uncovers a central concern, one which Foucault expounded, of "reclaiming the subjectivity of the body" and granting it prominence; the bodies she works with shape the vocabulary through their individualities. A pedestrian way of moving is encouraged and her use of sounds and dialogue demand that the dancers become vocal as well as physical performers. Orlin's pieces are steeped in South African issues. Her controversial *the explosion of stars is not only reserved for ticket holders* (1994) saw the company wheeling spotlights around the stage as well as flirting with nudity, chewing books and flinging flour across the stage. It set out to challenge and highlight dislocation and renewal

in South African society. When asked what, if any, value her work held for the company, Hawkins replied:

Her work deals with SA issues, which is important. She also reflects the socio-political climate and deals with images that are new and fresh. They are linked to few recognisable dance steps. She works with repetition and you can find whatever you want from her work. Her music choices are always accessible. She asks the audience to be open and if you object to some of it at least you have an opinion. (Personal Interview, 1996)

De Wet revealed that the dancers love the versatility offered by visiting choreographers, even if they are not so fond of certain ways of working, one instance being Orlin's creative processes:

In one sense it's an interesting experience but it's not really a dancer's thing. For me it's more of a theatrical thing. (Personal Interview, 1997)

Boysie Cekwana, in his term as resident choreographer for the company, gave them the opportunity to experiment with a few styles of dance, but it is in *Still* (1995) "...that Cekwana seems to come closest towards fulfilling the artistic beliefs sought by contemporary dance practice." (Pienaar, 1995 : 65) In her thesis, Boysie Cekwana : The South African Dancing Body in Transition, Pienaar established that Cekwana had encouraged discussions with the dancers on the subject matter of violence and did not expect them to feel or experience in the same way that he did. Pienaar advanced her observations that this "democratic" approach to the making of a piece is often lacking in a classically-based company "where personality and personal debate are not considered integral to the creative process." (Ibid : 66)

2.9 A thumb-print vs. a re-print for PDC

Hawkins established that Cekwana's work gave the company a "fresh image", but with this recognition came pressures:

Some of his work has merit and some hasn't. *Still* is wonderful and *Brother*, *Brother* is lovely but not new. He has become an icon and has had a lot of pressure on him to create ethnic works that come from a black perspective. He needs to refine his skills more. Racial politics had a lot to do with his spectacular rise. (Personal Interview, 1996)

He went further to say that he did not feel that a resident choreographer challenged the dancers enough and that the company prefers to have the variety and added stimulus of visiting ones. Yet the argument for a resident choreographer is that he/she would be able to sculpt a kind of thumb-print for a company. Cekwana⁴⁶ was committed to making a certain amount of works and while not all of them were successful, it seemed that at that point PDC were most sure of the direction that they were taking. He gave PDC an identity, and the dancers responded well to the experience.

Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe, a member of **Moving Into Dance**, has risen to fame as a choreographer, his most recent triumph being invited to choreograph on Dance Theatre of Harlem in 1997. In recognition of his talent and achievements he was made resident choreographer. Sylvia Glasser, Artistic Director of Moving Into Dance, believes that this is beneficial to the company as his work has evolved with them and suits the dancers: "a resident choreographer does lend a company profile and recognition." (Glasser, Personal Interview 1997)

It is challenging to have guest choreographers like Comelin and Christopher Kindo but when they leave after having taught a work, the PDC has only a video to work from. In 1997

⁴⁶ Cekwana was resident choreographer for PDC from the beginning of 1994 until the end of 1995.

Comelin taught his modern ballet, the haunting *Daughters of Mourning*, several months before performance. It was then rehearsed closer to the time from the video tape. It is perhaps inevitable that something gets lost without that hands-on moulding and shaping and nurturing. Hawkins' attempts to keep the style and aesthetic of the company varied are laudable, but further pushing of the boundaries is needed to engender an organic transformation of training processes, beginning within the company itself.

2.10 A handful of seasons: expanding in new directions

A vast majority of the seasons that have been produced during the years of Hawkins' directorship have followed the trend laid by his predecessors in terms of format in that they have consisted of triple or multiple bills. Hawkins maintains that these are manageable and necessary with a small company and reduced finances. They also allow for a diversity of choreography and themes. Foremost has been Hawkins' desire to promote and extend original South African work rather than producing past masterpieces:

We have been excited about making new work and have taken up the challenge...and the classics are too expensive to do. We want people to be excited by new work and get past preconceived ideas about what dance is or should be. Also, the company has been given the chance to choreograph, which is vital as a learning experience.
(Personal Interview, 1996)

He added that with audiences on the decline it is impossible to stage versions of the classics on a regular basis - there would just not be enough people to support them and Durban theatregoers rarely see something twice.

Hawkins remains dedicated to exposing dancers and audiences alike to a variety of works, this being the revolutionary aspect of the company's transformation process. He began his stint as Artistic Director with a season entitled *New Directions* in 1993. The title alone served to inform the public that the company would be traversing new paths. Invited guests

from Zimbabwe, Tumbuka Dance Company, shared the stage with contemporary South African work by Susan Abraham, Hawkins, Cekwana and Gary Gordon. Gordon's piece, *Travellers*, the company's first adventure into the realms of physical theatre, was created especially for them. Sjoerd Meijer, a critic with **Tonight** called it "a truly modernist collection, avant-garde beyond the cultish definitions of dance..." (1993c) while Ballantyne commented on "the physicality and freshness of the choreography and the close human contact between the dancers."(**Sunday Tribune**, 1993b) Words like "unconventional", "revolutionary" and "diverse" captured the impact of the programme.

Explosion of Dance in 1994 showcased the works of both local and overseas artists, displaying an attempt to maintain a balance. Lynn Maree urged the audience to open themselves "to the pleasure of watching highly-trained and sensitive dancers respond to the demands of living, mature, creative choreographers."(Programme note, 1994) A glance at the range of work testifies to the willingness of the company to embrace diversity. *Muddy*, by British choreographer Janet Smith, explored ensemble work using kaleidoscope patterns, an experiment with form rather than content, fluid mingling of bodies in space; Orlin's *the explosion of stars is not only reserved for ticket holders*, "an essentially African piece...that culminates in a demonstration of what happens to people when the world is at war."(Hathway, **Natal Mercury**, 1994) The final two works comprised Cekwana's classically based *pas de deux* for two males, *Brother, Brother*, to the soaring strains of Vivaldi and Schubert, and the witty, "personal experience of lost love", *Breakfast for whoever wants to come*, by British choreographer Neville Campbell. Despite warm reviews from critics and enthusiastic comments from the small audiences that supported it, the season was "a damp squib with [the] public." (Ballantyne, **Sunday Tribune**, 1994b)

A more recent season, *Kick-Start* in 1996, focussed entirely on South African choreography, all three pieces being premiered at the National Arts Festival.⁴⁷ It was a less satisfying programme in terms of quality, but once again afforded an opportunity for the creation of original and varied works. Cekwana's *It's this wall upon my clock* opted for the design aesthetic of a male dressing-room and choreography that mixed some ballet vocabulary with a few rolls and falls, speaking volumes of the dilemma that many choreographers face - which style is best? Orlin contributed *that's the way the cookie crumbles* for a female ensemble, this time using loaves of bread as props and the inevitable lights. Hawkins concluded with his "classical" *The Sylph: She's dancing as fast as she can*, a burlesque of Fokine's *Les Sylphides*. An analysis of this work will follow in Chapter Three as an example of Hawkins' personal journey into the question of identity and the struggle the PDC have had to adapt to the process of transformation.

The value of programmes of mixed works highlights an important part of the PDC's attempts to adapt. Mary Brennan, dance critic for **The Glasgow Herald**, once again succinctly reveals their worth:

So many of the artistic obligations which presently colour a company's policy - the need to be a 'living archive' of classical tradition even while encouraging new talents and new directions within dance - can only be honoured through regular programmes of short works. (Programme note for *Expanded Horizons* 1993)

2.11 Authenticate or re-invent: familiar forms in contemporary dressing

Perhaps one of the most successful attempts to "move in a new direction" has been through Hawkins' re-interpretation and updating of well-loved classics such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1995), *Les Sylphides* (1996) and PDC's final offering for 1997, *The*

⁴⁷ Please refer to Article Two in Appendix C, p.102 for a favourable review on the season.

Nutcracker. Praise for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was centred on its appeal to "today's audiences" and Hawkins' "foresight and willingness to take a chance with Natal's fickle audiences." (Ballantyne, **Sunday Tribune**, 1995) Jean-Paul Comelin, whose *Les Nuits d'Ete* was performed in the same programme as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, commented on the need to introduce audiences to more modern ballets: "a dance company is no different from an orchestra. No orchestra is only going to perform music written between the 16th and 19th centuries." (Shevlin, **Sunday Tribune**, 1995)

Hawkins does not discard the classical ballet system that gave him his own training but uses his training as a springboard for innovation in his works. In this way he attempts to make the "mysterious" ballet more accessible. The word "elite" has become synonymous with art and all things classical and it "makes the unenlightened public fearful of something they may not understand, and anyway can't afford." (Nugent, DTJ, 1996 : 32) The value of art lies in the fact that it is capable of touching people on many different levels. Deborah Bull, Principal Dancer with the Royal Ballet, espoused the notion that art can entertain, "not a concept that critics of so-called 'elitist art' like to consider, but audiences do actually enjoy the ballet."⁴⁸

It could be argued that playing with the classics is "playing safe". Mike Dixon, writing for Dance Europe⁴⁹, criticises the "mood of conservatism" that has crept into normally audacious and innovative British choreographers' work.⁵⁰ He suggests that "the spectrum of dance" is not being fully utilised and the colours have faded into "monochrome times." (DE,

⁴⁸ This article, *A Dancer's Defence*, appeared in the magazine Opera House, issue 9, 1996 : 36-39. Ms Bull had joined a debate at the Oxford Union at which she spoke out against the motion that the Lottery "gives too much support to the elitist arts." She won the debate.

⁴⁹ The title of the article is *Should we mess with classics?*

⁵⁰ Dixon also cites famous names from the contemporary dance realm who have replaced "classical choreography with modern choreography, whilst retaining the musical scores...intact." (1997 : 10) Some of these include : Mark Morris (*The Hard Nut*); Angelin Preljocaj (*Romeo and Juliet*) and Mats Ek (*Giselle*, *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*).

1997 : 13) Hawkins however, understands the need for entertainment and with Durban audiences clamouring for ballet, he has provided them with new versions that cater for a smaller company. Many choreographers all over the world are re-creating works from the canon. Christopher Gable⁵¹ is reworking *Giselle* and maintains that with poor support of triple bills, the audience must be given a title they know. Choreographers like Matthew Bourne⁵² are fascinated by the musical scores of the classics and use these as starting points for innovation. There is something to be said for re-inventing a classic, as Dixon observes:

Clearly the public love the narrative ballets and the great scores which go with them and artistic directors want to keep their audiences. It is a legitimate concern of dance creators to revisit the great works of the canon and make them speak in the language of the moment.

(DE, 1997 : 13)

In conclusion then, the PDC appear to be navigating the treacherous tightrope of change rather competently. The transformation process, presenting itself in many guises, is being interacted with on a daily basis. The company is attempting to maintain a sense of balance, the idea of retaining a reverence for the past but also having faith in whatever seems original, new and unconventional. Deborah Bull wrote that today a dance company is expected to “be both museum and laboratory. Without the experimental work which is so often derided as nonsense by detractors of the arts, there will be no popular classics of the future.” (*Opera House*, 1996 : 39) She reminds us that a great work such as *Les Sylphides* was deemed unacceptable when first performed because of its then radical departure from the usual structure of classical ballet. Hawkins, and many others, is at least endeavouring to re-

⁵¹ Gable is Artistic Director of Northern Ballet Theatre in Britain. He is mounting a radical new *Giselle*. Dixon states that some of the original choreography is being mixed with new elements so that a mixture of styles will be created, each in its dramatic context.

⁵² Bourne, whose most recent version of *Swan Lake* with an all-male cast received critical acclaim, has reinvented *Cinderella* for Adventures in Motion Pictures. It is set during the time of the Blitz. Another choreographer, Michael Rolnick, has reworked *The Sleeping Beauty* for City Ballet of London. He has done away with pointe work but, since the dancers are classically trained, has loosened the classical style so that his dramatic intentions are still clear.

invent and explore. Peters' observations will gather importance, and indeed resonate, as we journey on to the next chapter:

...cultural representations, unlike either beads or land, can be borrowed without anyone missing them...they have the grace (like human beings) to be fruitful and multiply without much training, and they have the good sense (also like human beings) to transform themselves in the process. (1995 : 211)

CHAPTER THREE

KICK-START FOR SURVIVAL

Methods for Metamorphosis

The theme for this chapter focuses on positive reforms highlighted by Hawkins' personal brand of choreography. The chapter also discusses the impact of Siwela Sonke, which appears to be motivated towards the identification of an expression drawing on the various dance forms practised by the people of this region, Kwazulu-Natal. A critique of Hawkins' *The Sylph: She's dancing as fast as she can* (1996), and a discussion of the multi-cultural exercise that is Siwela will show that transformation is occurring within the Playhouse dance department, albeit with many shortcomings.

A CRITIQUE OF *THE SYLPH: SHE'S DANCING AS FAST AS SHE CAN*⁵³

“Everything is beautiful at the ballet...”⁵⁴ or is it?

Hawkins' re-interpretations and his light-hearted (some would say irreverent) approach to some of the most well-known and highly regarded ballets, can be seen as a positive transformative response to a shifting climate. Hawkins' *The Sylph* plays with elements of disclosure and self-reflection through the burlesque of ballet. Andre Levinson, the renowned Russian writer, penned the following thoughts on the ballet technique:

[It] has gradually become exalted and transfigured until it is now called upon to express the loftiest emotions of the human soul [so that] when a dancer rises on her pointes, she breaks away from the exigencies of everyday life, and enters into an enchanted country - that she may thereby lose herself in the ideal. (1980 : 299)

⁵³ Hereafter referred to as *The Sylph*.

⁵⁴ This general cliché is often used and conjures a vision of perfection and an ideal state of existence. It came to the fore quite prominently in the lyrics of the hit musical *A Chorus Line*.

It is pertinent to open a discussion of Hawkins' work in light of the above quotation. Instead of "exalting" the ideals and perfection of ballet, Hawkins shows it in a new light through his use of burlesque. He takes as his departure point the familiar *Les Sylphides*. "This extended joke at Fokine's expense" (Sichel, *The Star*, 1996a) introduces into the academic ballet vocabulary earthier movements, that subvert the aerial vision of the ballerina. The substitution of boots instead of pointe shoes during the piece highlights this subversion. The norm of the ballerina being of the female sex is upended when we witness male dancers rising on their pointes, adding to the humour.

Instead of distancing himself and the content of his work from "the exigencies of everyday life", Hawkins reminds us of the difficult issue of funding for the arts in a local context. Through his interpretation, Durban replaces "an enchanted country" suggesting a rather "disenchanted" one. Hawkins constantly refers to the "ideal" through the theme of dancers abusing their bodies to attain perfection. Thus he aims to reveal the processes behind the belief that "everything is beautiful at the ballet..." Hawkins revealed that behind the pretty balletic picture presented to the audience is a "life of sacrifice that sucks up your mind and body." (Personal Interview, 1996) This is a direct reference to the title of the work: Hawkins attaches specific meaning to the words *She's dancing as fast as she can*. It's about "having to do as much as possible to survive all of the time." (Personal Interview, 1996) This determination to survive and succeed is intrinsically linked to the ballet dancer's pursuit of perfection, an ideal valued by audiences. It can also be seen as a comment on the PDC's own daily struggle to survive. When this work premiered in July 1996, the company was reduced to sixteen dancers⁵⁵ and funding was at an all-time low.

⁵⁵ In 1997 the company numbers plummeted further to eight members and had to rely on *ad hoc* dancers to supplement seasons.

Performance artist Andrew Buckland⁵⁶ shed light on what it means to “burlesque” something:

To take one aspect or element of a work and exaggerate it. In this case, the notion of the sylph and the femininity attached to her.
(Personal Interview, July 1996)

This is most evident with Hawkins’ use of the male company members to swell the ranks of the *corps de ballet*, traditionally the domain of the female. “Humour used in this way helps people become open to an idea, it relaxes them.” (Buckland, 1996) Hawkins’ reason for using this device rests on the fact that “the audience must be made aware that things have shifted: we no longer have eighteen girls to be the *corps*, so we make do.” (1996) Nestling behind the humour lies a serious issue that is exposed during the course of the work. Focusing on valid issues and requesting the audience to re-assess them is only part of Hawkins’ strategy, who revealed in an interview that he really just wanted the audience to relax, and to stop taking ballet so seriously.

It is necessary to set up what is meant by the term “self-reflexive” in order to discuss the work further. In balletic narratives the aim is to conceal the processes that go into making a work as maintaining an illusion of perfection, and the creation of magical beings are the ultimate goals. Lincoln Kirstein eloquently espouses on this notion:

In addition to mechanical mastery, the classic dancer embodies a controlled energy towards a perfect delivery of the dance vocabulary...concentrated, balanced and directed...” (1983 : 375)

One way of reacting against this classic ideal manifested itself in the modernist theories discussed by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. They proposed that “the role of art was to disclose

⁵⁶ Insight was sought from Buckland, an acclaimed mime artist and exponent of physical theatre, because his work is grounded in the comic genre. He has developed a remarkable individual style which has earned him, among others, five Vita Awards and three Edinburgh Fringe Firsts. Buckland (now an Associate Professor) has, from his student days at Rhodes University, been committed to discovering a new theatre language that combines mime, acting and movement skills.

the conditions of possibility of its own existence.” (Carroll, 1992 : 324) David Michael Levin articulates that modernist works of art are “self-referential without being strictly representational...” (1990 : 211) Furthermore they “call into question” traditional conventions. Most importantly, the artwork - in this case a particular ballet - which is perceived as an object, “becomes the subject of the work.” (Levin : 212)

Hawkins uses the historical essence of a known ballet and reworks it. He offers an alternative viewpoint on gender with men *en pointe*, the theme of dancers’ abuse of their bodies and unusual theatricality. He does not offer an entirely new structure or form (he is still interacting with a classical vocabulary) but he does present a novel approach to content by infusing comments on gender, sexuality and images that belong to a more immediate time-frame. When asked why he chose *Les Sylphides* as his departure point for a burlesque, he replied:

Because it has no story, I didn’t have to change it. It has a look and musical score that everybody knows. The audience can relate to the new version because of their familiarity with the original.
(Personal Interview, 1996)

This illustrates clearly the strategy of self-reflexiveness that Hawkins employs. It is useful to refer to a description of *Les Sylphides* by Brinson and Crisp:

When the curtain rises, the *corps de ballet* and four principals...are grouped in a semi-circle against the forest background. The *danseuses* wear the traditional white ballet skirts of the Taglioni period. When they move the effect is of mist dissolving and reforming. *Les Sylphides* is composed in the manner of the pure romantic ballet as a series of four *variations* and a *pas de deux* framed in two ensembles. (1970 : 76)

As *The Sylph* begins, it seems to differ very little from Fokine’s original: Chopin’s lilting composition fills the auditorium as the curtain (a mass of shimmering silver that hints to the more observant that this is to be no pale reflection of the original) rises up to reveal a massed *corps* in traditional white tutus. In misty lighting the subtle ballet picture is completed with graceful *arabesques*, lyrical arms and elegant *bourres* on full *pointe*. The audience is lulled into a feeling

of security through the formality of the presentation. The opening re-creates faithfully the mood of tranquillity and delicacy. Fokine's choreography "is a loving evocation of the Romantic era." (Robertson and Hutera, 1988 : 46) Brinson and Crisp describe the mood as being:

...spiritual, tinged with sadness, except for the more animated concluding ensemble. The total effect is poetry for whose proper performance purity of style is essential without any form of excess or exaggeration. (1970 : 76)

Hawkins teases his audience with the briefest morsel of lyricism as, without warning, the burlesque launches into action with a new and more urgent energy that prevails throughout the work. The introduction of cymbals and triangles into the new version of the music prompts the *corps* to split apart to reveal male and female ballerinas. The opening is self-referential with its invocation of the original, as well as humorous with its "impressive gender-bending macho *corps* of muscular bodies." (Sichel, **Star Tonight**, 1996a) Even though Hawkins' may seem to "trade on the hoary old gag of males dancing *sur les pointes*..." (Coleman, **Natal Mercury**, 1996) the exaggeration of the sylph and the female qualities associated with her provide the subversive humour necessary for the burlesque. When asked if he deliberately set out to subvert gender roles and stereotypes, Hawkins replied:

Not really. It was not explored completely. Perhaps the message is that things have changed and that it really doesn't matter who's doing the pointe work. (Personal Interview, 1996)

Nevertheless, the hallowed ground of the female ballerina has been invaded in this work and supplies an effective source of humour. The physical language used shows men and women performing the same vocabulary of steps, thus opposing the idea of assigning specific roles to each gender. The inaccessibility and unattainability of the sylph is upended, one cannot ignore the inherent maleness of these bodies. Buckland suggests that the innuendo could be:

that it is possible for men to play the same game. The feminine mystique of the sylph is inverted, a reversal of the set expectation that is found to be funny. (Personal Interview, 1996)

Excess as opposed to subtlety becomes the hallmark of Hawkins' ballet as he uses the tradition to further upend "the harmonious and ideal form." (Adair, 1992 : 84) Being classically trained he admits to utilising the ballet technique as it is the vocabulary he is most familiar with; but his rehearsal process enlarged on this with the dancers being asked to contribute ideas and opinions. This is a positive transformative device with the company being challenged to workshop sequences and experiment, instead of merely being dictated to. He admitted to "knowing the music backwards" before entering the studio but not having everything choreographed in his head. Movement phrases were explored and then reversed or subverted, so the dancers were relied upon for material. Hawkins attempted to infiltrate the formal, academic "purity of style" with movements or sequences that are more contemporary and always executed in a quirky, comic manner.

The choreography picks up on themes inherent in the work. Contrasted with a female dancer's rendition of the willowy Fokine choreography, is the clumsiness of three male dancers who are trying to exit gracefully but trip over each other's feet. The softness of an *arabesque* line becomes a harsh, jagged thrusting through the air, while a series of *grand jetes* resolve into rolls on the floor. Another dissonant chord is plucked when two dancers conclude a series of leaps by clutching their backs and hobbling off-stage, revealing dancers' abuse of their bodies. The ballet vocabulary and the aesthetic that embodies concealment are effectively subverted through humorous disclosure. Hawkins attempts to exaggerate the earthiness of his sylphs through this physical language. "The ethereal image of the ballerina rising onto pointe and limiting her contact with the earth..." (Sayers, 1993 : 168) is set up at the beginning of the work, but the introduction of heavy duty boots accounts for the destruction of this ethereality. The modern update grounds much of the movement. Dancers enter in a flurry of *grand jetes* which end in backward rolls along the floor; a *plie* is inverted when it is performed lying on the floor, legs in the air; and in the finale, an endless stream of dancers do handstands and beats in the air which then dissolve into a

sequence of floorwork. Reference to the aerial nature of the sylph is even made through the use of updated humour: a sound effect indicates an aeroplane flying overhead and a male dancer *jete*s into the space, while the others interrupt their sequence to stare aimlessly skyward.

Hawkins is attempting to work against “the choreographic and stylistic demands of ballet that take the weight of the body and make it disappear into thin air.” (Foster, 1996 : 14) The fact that the boots do not complete the line of the leg is not concealed but magnified with the use of flexed feet, buoyancy is replaced with heaviness. This weightedness could also read as a metaphor for the struggle to survive under the burden of severe financial constraints. The boots successfully inform much of the movement vocabulary. At times however, the purely balletic steps that are not inverted look clumsy when performed in boots. When quick footwork is attempted the boots hamper rather than aid the execution, leaving an impression of sloppiness.

The tendency of modernist artworks to “call into question their traditionally definitive conditions” (Levin: 211) is successfully explored through Hawkins’ use of the *pas de deux*. Judith Lynne Hanna describes it as follows:

The outstanding and widely recognised sign of sexuality in ballet is the heterosexual *pas de deux* and partnering style in which the man supports, manipulates, and often conquers the woman. (1988 : 166)

This is overturned in *The Sylph* where men perform almost all the *pas de deux* work. This exposes the audience to an alternative view with the function of providing humour through role reversal. Traditional methods of lifting and supporting are employed as well as moments of slapstick where one male gets handed from one partner to another until they all collapse with sheer exertion and strike the now famous “sylph pose”: lying on one side, finger to lip. Here the image of the sylph is referred to, but subverted with the use of male dancers.

Hawkins, to begin with, remains faithful to the ideals of classical symmetry in his use of structure and space. Fokine worked towards creating moving pictures of mood with his *corps*. Rarely static, his choreography explored a “more rounded lyrical quality than the classical lines of Petipa’s time, (Brinson and Crisp, 1970 : 77) meshing perfectly with the serene mood of the ballet. The dancers in *The Sylph* are driven by a contrasting energy, one of speed and emergency. While one dancer performs a short solo, the remainder of the group are changing out of one costume and into another in full view of the audience. This tactic of “disclosing the processes behind the myth” is utilised twice. Instead of concealing the costume changes, Hawkins directs attention to them. He is breaking “the code of manners that renders a work classical.” (Macaulay, 1987 : 37) This strategy is imaginative in principle; but viewing it as a member of the audience, the dancers seemed hurried and rushed as they raced to keep in time with the music. From another viewpoint, the mad scramble from one costume into another clearly relates favourably with the title and content of the work.

To continue exploring Hawkins’ theme of seeking to “reveal what ballet hides” through the use of humour, one needs to understand his decidedly off-beat vision for the piece. In comparison to the harmonious, ideal world of ethereal creatures where collisions and mistakes never occur, Hawkins desired the overall impression to be:

like a school concert where nothing quite happens as it’s supposed to and the “magic of dance” or the illusion behind it is shattered when you see the dancers moving the set. (Personal Interview, 1996)

This would never occur in a traditional ballet where scenery is manipulated by invisible hands to maintain an illusion. Unfortunately, in performance at the national Arts Festival 1996, the set proved to be cumbersome and the reality of things going wrong was all too obvious as dancers battled to manoeuvre it successfully within the limited space. An effective humorous moment did occur, however, when dancers pulled away a truck to reveal a sly dig at the original ballet:

human heads poked through a cut-out depicting the opening tableau of the male poet and three ballerinas. As well as referring to the source of the burlesque, the female face matched to the male body signified that stereotyping had no place in this version where gender was interchangeable.

Although Sichel commented that “the theme of dancers abusing their bodies gets dissipated by the over-the-top design” (*Star Tonight*, 1996a), the sets successfully function within a “self-referential” framework. The lakeside or forest glade, with its hues of blues and greens, in *Les Sylphides* is evoked in the updated “abstract” forest of three-dimensional movable trucks with their swirls and spirals in *The Sylph*.

Hawkins’ use of costume invokes strong references to the source, but also subverts it. The white romantic tutus and pointe shoes in the opening, conjure the original sylphs. But at a closer perusal, one notices the silver wings attached to ankles and wrists, as opposed to the unobtrusive back. These wings are the source of much humour as they are flapped in time to the music, perhaps hinting that these sylphs have no pretensions of gossamer aeriality and prefer to remain earthbound. There is no distinction between costumes for men or women; this establishes them as an ensemble. Hawkins continues his expedition into the use of excess to create humour when, in true burlesque fashion, the company divest themselves of romantic garb and perform the rest of the work in figure-hugging purple unitards that highlight rather than conceal their bodies, and boots. Hawkins said he wanted to incorporate “rave clothing that fit in with the times and gave more freedom.” (Personal Interview, 1996)

A personal reading of the work pinpoints the use of localisation as a means of subverting tradition. In the design of the set and costumes, Hawkins seems to place the work in a local

context, that of Durban. Instead of transporting us to a fairytale glade, the patterns of swirls on the sets bear a strong resemblance to waves, while the purple costumes have elements of a sporty, athletic look that would not be out of place on the Durban beachfront. At one point the music degenerates and the dancers “lose interest”; and a beach umbrella, sunglasses and cigarettes are wheeled onto the stage. This relaxed “Durban” feel cleverly reveals, rather than conceals, that dancers are humans who need breaks, not machines.

Perhaps too close to home for some is Hawkins’ pointed reference to the lack of funding for the arts. The girls are performing a romantic send-up with hula hoops and three male dancers dressed in “Sarafina” schoolgirl outfits throw banknotes over their heads. This strategy of placing a serious issue in a different light fulfils the function of a burlesque. The fact that the girls continue to dance regardless links to the title and the will to survive.

Hawkins’ strategy of displaying the boredom dancers experience when endlessly repeating the same movements, produced some unsuccessful moments of humour. The exorbitant use of slapstick: dancers, for example, constantly bumping into each other sometimes served to undermine the clever use of disclosure through humour elsewhere. The utilisation of “ballet mime”, stereotypical gestures and overacting, all appeared inadequate in developing the burlesque and displayed a weakness in achieving comic intent. The problem seemed to be rooted in the fact that the dancers utilised a postural acting style embedded in the classical ballet tradition - a problem that Fokine, ironically, attempted to deal with in his choreographic reforms⁵⁷. On a positive note, these little episodes allowed the dancers to play with individual personalities, greatly contrasting with a traditional *corps*, the “endlessly duplicated minor

⁵⁷ Fokine created *Les Sylphides* to illustrate his belief in the expressive nature of dance, that dancers should be expressive through their whole body. He moved away from the virtuosic displays and exaggerated posturing that characterised the mammoth full-length ballets of Petipa believing that original, poetic movement should correspond with setting, style, subject and period.

ballerinas.” (Foster, 1996 : 10) Perhaps its real worth was as a reference to the original. The real human issues such as boredom being revealed on stage (and not confined to the dressing room) subvert the notion of the sylph as “other-worldly”. Hawkins invests the “object” with subjectivity.

One of Hawkins’ most effective sources of humour is Chopin’s score or rather, Anthony Stonier’s contorted version of it. The strategy of self-reflection comes out most strongly here. The music is recognisable but has been manipulated. The non-intrusive original evokes perfection, lyricism and grace, while the updated one becomes intrusive and off-beat. Triangles, synthesisers, cymbals, electric guitars and voice-overs intersperse with the original, hinting that “things are out of place” and disorderly.

In uncovering the processes behind the myth, Hawkins’ subversive humour takes centre stage:

Tongue-in-cheek, this piece shatters the classical ballet myth. The graceful lines of the dancers hide the agonies that all dancers must suffer to maintain an illusion of perfection. (Elias, **The Daily Despatch**, 1996)

Hawkins revealed the effort that dancers must muster to execute the ideal that Kirstein celebrates as “a continuous aria of the aerial.” (1983 : 130) Hawkins’ sylphs are subjugated to the ground as they try in vain to get to their knees. Gone are the poised lines of eloquent harmony; this is a picture of exhaustion and effort “depicting what damage decades of dance training does to body and soul...” (Hathway, **The Daily News**, 1996) In the finale, the desperate strains of the sped-up score inform the movement as the dancers attempt to execute leaps and jumps. They finally collapse to the floor and crawl off-stage, bemoaning their aches and pains. This time the subversive humour reaches its mark – the sylph is, indeed, “dancing as fast as she can.”

Finally, adding to the theme and “rounding off the burlesque of boys in tutus”, is the entrance of Hawkins himself as the old ballerina, legs strapped and hoisted up by a walker. He sees her as bringing together all the threads of the piece:

She represents the upholding of tradition, the classical ballet, and the clown make-up refers to the burlesque as well as to the need to conceal all that does not fit the ideal: age manifested in wrinkles. The jewels and tiara, the trappings of the fairytale, make her whole again [the ideal and pretence is upheld]. The walker and bandages signify damage to the body, the onset of arthritis. Finally, survival against all odds and pushing into the future is suggested. (Personal Interview, 1996)

The final picture echoes that of the original and contains Hawkins’ personal quirky “dig” at the constructed romance of ballet: the *corps* surround the old ballerina in various poses, snowflakes falling on their heads, waving to the audience.

Despite moments of humour that may not have worked in performance, the “object as subject” is effectively brought to a close in the final scene. The exaggerated earthiness of Hawkins’ sylphs and the quirky design elements proved to have great impact, highlighting the theme of “things being out of place”. His clever reversal of expected norms allowed the audience to deal with serious issues such as funding in a light way. His successful uncovering of the processes behind the myth that “everything is beautiful at the ballet...” reveals Hawkins’ commitment to taking chances to ensure the survival of the PDC. Aware that he does not have the resources granted to his predecessors and that a small budget and equally small company demand a different approach, Hawkins has shrewdly concocted a recipe for transformation. This “recipe” does not erase the classics completely but instead dresses them in contemporary fashion and serves them up as adventurous re-inventions.

AND THEN [THEY] BLEW IN...

While arts council companies are under severe threat of survival, in Durban a company was born under the aegis of the Playhouse Company dance department. Siwela Sonke holds some of the answers in terms of the training approach, and aesthetic and choreographic identity, of a truly South African dance company. (Sichel, **The Star Tonight**, 1997a)

A contentious but strong development has been the establishment of another dance company: Siwela Sonke. The birth of this second dance company appears to call into question the purpose, integrity and artistic contribution of the PDC. It shares an uneasy co-existence with the PDC as they seem to operate at opposite ends of the dance spectrum. Both companies have merit, however, and their work should be seen as having equal worth. This section serves to illustrate the processes brought into play with the arrival of Siwela Sonke, processes that contrast sharply with PDC's but also act as a complement to them.

3.1 Mission: to cross to a new place altogether

Siwela Sonke means "crossing over to a new place altogether" and was created in 1994 with the vision of extending the language of dance by utilising the rich source of Kwazulu-Natal's diverse dance heritage. Gumboot, pantsula, the indhlamu, ballet, contemporary European and contemporary African dance, classical Indian and Indian folk dance are all present in this region. An eclectic dance training drawing on all these forms and based on the natural movement and anatomy of the body was to be taught. Coupled with this desire to search and experiment with many forms, was the developmental ethos of providing employment opportunities for people whose dance training was not exclusively ballet, and who came from disadvantaged communities.

The project began as a training programme - an education and development initiative. In 1995, several students were offered full-time salaries. In April 1997, under the leadership of Jay Pather, formerly of Jazzart, Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre was launched as a company with ten

members. The Education and Development department at the Playhouse provides funding. This department seems to be going a long way to promoting positive principles such as development and the right to experiment over commercial viability. The mission statement of Siwela Sonke espouses the urge to “speak to our communities with a directness and an immediacy...to create an ongoing dialogue with our audiences.” (Pamphlet on Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre, 1997) The aesthetic is informed by a cross-cultural theme and Gita Pather says the company was formed to “bring people together to understand that our cultural practices may be different but all have echoes of each other.” She elaborated on the rationale behind establishing another company:

Jazzart kind of opened the way... I’ve always been interested in cross-cultural and inter-cultural performance and all the problems that go with it... The whole idea was developmental: a company of primarily black dancers who showed potential to dance but had no dance training... And then creating a vocabulary that was unique to South Africa. (Personal Interview, 1997)

It is interesting to note that the people chosen to guide this young company have been carefully considered. Alfred Hinkel and now Jay Pather, have been intimately connected to Jazzart and other initiatives and projects that have, for many years, been involved in searching for new ways of dance-making and for democratic training processes. Pather himself, in the past, has been actively vocal in his opposition to arts council products and processes. Questioned on his willingness to take on a company supported by an arts council now, he said:

One of the good things is that it’s about the only performing arts council in this country that has taken any major strides in the field of education and development and has made it work. The Playhouse Company started initiating change a long time ago, before the elections... There is enough going on, together with all the dead wood, to feel that there has been enough of a change.
(Personal Interview, 1997)

He added that Siwela Sonke was “a testament to the concept of education and development by trying to redress the terrible wounds of the country.” (Personal Interview, 1997)

3.2 Routes to an identity

In search of insight into how Pather wanted audiences to perceive the company, he was baited with the question of identity. He is fervent in maintaining that the best word to describe the company and the work they do is “eclectic”:

We will begin to develop something that will begin to be an **identity**. It’s still developing ... For a long while we will be associated with a maverick kind of style and will remain eclectic. For an identity to develop we need to be on the edge all the time and push boundaries. That’s where we would like to be - constantly experimenting. (Personal Interview, 1997)

This flows naturally into Hall’s concept of “becoming rather than being”:

...not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might *become*, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we *might* represent ourselves. (1996 : 4) [My emphasis]

Pather eschews closure, margins that limit. This is clear when he speaks of the PDC and the process they are undergoing. He sees the PDC as relevant, exciting but also “a living archive” for classical works. His personal view is:

Their [PDC’s] identity is clearly within a classical base. What blurs their image a little bit is purely that they’ve taken a step into the 20th century. They’re not just doing museum pieces but what they do is not always definable. (Personal Interview, 1997)

This melds with the vision of embracing a multitude of ideas and roles, so that, as Derrida describes, there is no “violent hierarchy” between two extremes. To this end, Siwela Sonke is seeking both to entertain and to be thought-provoking, to be accessible as well as street-wise.

3.3 Street-wise dialogues: out-reaching

Siwela Sonke’s education and outreach work functions on a variety of levels. They perform a programme for high schools, *Gangsta*, based on the issue of gangsterism; children’s stories are adapted for junior schools; and last year they mounted a production in The Studio at the Playhouse called *Unclenching the Fist* that focused on the abuse of women. One of their first

seasons, *Wet and other Works* (December 1996), has formed the basis for touring programmes, its main theme being a humorous look at dating. Pather is forthright when calling the company's work "issue-driven". He added dryly that dance purists would shudder.

The presentation for schools functions as a full performance but Moller emphasised that Pather introduces the programme to the students, tells them what the dancers do and what's involved in the rehearsal period. Questioned as to whether the dancers interact with the children, Pather replied:

There's never enough time. We all want to talk but at the end of the performance the bell's gone. We're trying to make a shorter programme so we can talk more but the students like to converse with the dancers individually as opposed to a discussion session. (Personal Interview, 1997)

The company apparently also requires, like the PDC, mats with which to cover surfaces but the dancers adapt to each situation

We have performed some pieces in the street as part of a carnival and in shopping centres. It's street-wise and accessible. I also want to have things like an open rehearsal in the mall and have people watching us rehearse and then invite them to talk about it. (Pather, Personal Interview, 1997)

Pather's vision is expansive and involves "decentralising" their work. They are "determined to retell stories of communities whose stories have remained untold." (Sichel, *Star Tonight*, 1997a). This vision encompasses travelling beyond formal theatres to colleges, prisons, clinics, community halls and shopping malls. They are taking dance off the formal *Swan Lake* stage which appears to be a workable vision, one Moller cites as invaluable:

The average passer-by can walk past and enjoy a dance performance simply by what's being presented to them as opposed to having to be familiar with codes and gestures and stories that are not part of everybody's vocabulary. (Personal Interview, 1997)

Since the company has a new and therefore limited repertoire, works from their launch season are performed at shopping centres but they are always considerably reworked. It appears that this is one of the company's most commendable facets. Works are never allowed to stagnate or

remain untouched for too long. Moller referred to pieces such as Pather's *Medley* and *Wet*, both now over a year or more old since they were first performed, as "constantly being overhauled". Siwela Sonke's outreach, therefore, differs greatly to PDC's: the emphasis is on societal issues with a message and thus is more immediate.

Like the PDC, the members of Siwela Sonke are involved in a certain amount of teaching. Pather expressed a valid concern with this, as the dancers are still coming to grips with the art of dancing:

I know that there are hundreds of kids dying to be taught but I worry about what those kids are going to learn. These dancers are still young themselves and need more maturity. They are being trained as dancers now. Some are good teachers but they have a way to go.

(Personal Interview, 1997)

Nevertheless, as the company has grown in experience they have contributed to the teaching ethos at the Playhouse. They participate in the *Steps into Dance* programme, as well as hosting such initiatives as a teachers' workshops in May 1997. Here, school teachers learnt basic rules of choreography, themes and use of space and time.

3.4 More audience troubles

Siwela Sonke suffers from the same malaise as PDC, that of lack of support from the Durban public⁵⁸. Moller explained that the launch season in April had played to half-full houses but that this had been better than anticipated. She also commented on the vast support received from the media in the run-up to opening night. The problem remains as ever that a variety of different works can be offered to the public but despite this, empty houses remain the order of the day. Moller strongly believes that much of the problem lies with the fact that the majority of the company is black and white audiences are afraid they will not understand their work. Another

⁵⁸ See Chapter Two, p.38 where the discussion concerning poor audience support for the PDC was dealt with.

factor that might have contributed to poor houses was the run of *Queen at the Opera*⁵⁹ at the same time. Durban theatregoers pounce on the commercial productions and tend to ignore new and innovative work. Moller spoke too about the struggle to build up a black audience:

...there isn't a tradition of theatre-going. So arriving on time for a performance [transport being a major pitfall], paying R20 to get in and having to sit in silence and not get involved is completely foreign so they'd rather not do it...It's had a limited success and the audiences are getting better. We've had better support from young people and black media. The dancers have a lot of pull in getting their friends in. (Personal Interview, 1997)

Gita Pather had relevant insights to add about the poor audience support for both dance companies:

In any economically constrained society the arts are the first to go, so what is happening to us is no different to what is happening to the rest of the world, except it's compounded by the problems of the history of this company [Playhouse Company] and we're attempting to do everything we can to change it as best we can. (Personal Interview, 1997)

She believes that audiences are being given provocative and artistic work by the PDC - work that has integrity - and that Siwela Sonke are challenging perceived notions about dance and feeding into the artistic bloodstream of a society in flux. As Ballantyne wrote in a review on Siwela's launch programme:

...a niggling doubt pervades the birth of this bold and brave new company. Will the slack Durban public show an interest and support for it? Or will it falter in its first footsteps...? (*Sunday Tribune*, 1997)

3.5 Conceptual training: a multi-cultural language

I direct the company but the dancers' input runs through a whole range of things from content, to the way the company is run and this is invaluable. I build in seminars, consultations and forums so there is a context of learning that goes with the practical. I've always said that Siwela Sonke is a concept, it's not about personalities... (Personal Interview, 1997)

⁵⁹ This musical extravaganza, inspired by the music of Freddie Mercury and his band and created and conceptualised by the late Geoffrey Sutherland, has been mounted several times over the years in the Opera Theatre and has never failed to play to full houses for the entire run. The same can be said for any musical theatre production that plays at the Playhouse. Durban audiences thrive on them but eschew experimental and local work as it does not correspond to their inherited Western cultural bias that places musicals at the top of the artistic heap.

Pather's words paint a lucid, liberated picture of the training processes and policy of Siwela Sonke. Experimentation and exploration are encouraged on many levels, and the dancers are not unquestioning arts council (and before that, ballet school) products. Nor is Pather's role perceived as a dictatorship. However, as De Wet pointed out in the previous chapter, with democratisation and opening out to input from dancers, comes a delicate balance. Pather explains:

Some days the dancers feel democratic, other days they don't and I feel the tension. Sometimes you let it go but ultimately we have a paying audience and we are a paid company. So while I value the education of those people, at the same time we have to deliver. (Personal Interview, 1997)

The process is important but also the product and Pather attempts never to lose sight of this fact. Siwela Sonke members are exposed to a variety of training methods which enables them to experience dance, not as a "closed text" (Hagemann, 1990 : 10)⁶⁰ but rather as a multi-faceted, ever-changing dialogue which sources the movement and rituals of a particular region for its vocabulary. Pather elaborated on the process they use during class time. Much of the work begins with a technique based on the "thinking body" where loose joints and release are desirable. The Alexander Technique is employed as a starting point. Pather also utilises floor exercises from the Graham technique and strengthening exercises based on Cunningham. Simpiwe Magazi⁶¹ contributes with a contemporary African technique based on the use of weight and momentum. The dancers also receive traditional African dance classes as well as ballet taught by Hawkins, and Indian dance such as Bharatha Natyam by Pather. Like PDC, Siwela members are privileged to have a range of guest teachers some of whom, such as Alfred Hinkel, Vusi

⁶⁰ Dr. Fred Hagemann is a distinguished South African dance scholar. He was trained at the University of Natal, Durban and is currently Head of the School of Dramatic Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand. Hagemann wrote, in 1990, of dance education as being taught in schools and studios as a "closed text", where a technique of dance, such as ballet or modern "has been maintained with little or no reference to the content or context of performance." (DJ : 11) Furthermore there is no allowance for "an inclusive vision or an aesthetic of dance different from the borrowed Euro-American one." (DJ : 11) In 1997, much dance education remains the same, and most of the dancers entering professional companies have had this experience of dance.

⁶¹ Magazi trained with Jazzart and has choreographed for them and PACT Dance Company. He currently teaches, choreographs for, and dances with Siwela Sonke.

Ngema, Boysie Cekwana and Yoke van der Klink taught in 1997. Supplementing the physical classes are seminars that involve discussions on a variety of topics, such as building an audience and evaluating the progress of the company. In 1996 a series of forums on adolescence provided material for their high school programme on gangsterism. Pather is therefore enlarging on an aim he has striven for for many years, that of creating dancers “with both brains and bodies.” (DJ, 1990 : 4)

A vital aspect of Siwela Sonke’s training is based on improvisation and workshopping. Pather speaks of discovering the “architecture of the body” and utilises Laban’s elements of space, weight and time to explore relationships. He also introduced acting classes to encourage sense and emotion memory, as well as voice classes and workshops on choreography. Clearly the dancers are challenged to invent themselves as performers. Pather also explains that a range of choreographic processes are used in rehearsal so that the dancers are constantly challenged, not just physically but emotionally and mentally too. Moller observed that:

Jay treats his dancers as very intelligent, contributing factors to the company. They’ll stop a rehearsal for debate or input. There is a multitude of different opinions and ideas because they’re from vastly different backgrounds. PDC have all come out of places such as UCT Ballet School...(Personal Interview, 1997)

Again, a contrast is drawn with the PDC and their way of working. Although the PDC is opening out to a more democratic process whereby input is acknowledged (and in some cases with Hawkins, invited), the structure of rehearsals is codified and has set parameters. As mentioned in the last chapter, a video is often worked from, so that a piece of choreography rather than being **re-interpreted** is **re-presented**. Siwela is re-shaping works all the time and in a programme note for their launch season, there is an acknowledgement of the **collaborative** approach used in the choreographic process. All these strategies have been born out of ideas, beliefs and practises that Pather has upheld for some time. In a paper delivered at the 1990 Dance Umbrella, he made a

statement that is being borne out by the existence of Siwela Sonke and exhibited in the work it does:

Democratic work processes in the creation of dances needs to be introduced to stimulate the production of dances that are as complex, strong and rich as the participants involved and the audiences that watch. (DJ, 1990 : 4)

3.6 Ahimsa Ubuntu: a “choreographic charter”⁶²

One of the company’s first major exercises was the multi-media production of *Ahimsa Ubuntu*, commissioned by the Institute for Black Research and conceptualised by Fatima Meer to launch her book The South African Gandhi: 1893-1914. It toured to India and Sri Lanka in October 1996 as part of a cultural exchange. The piece, described as a dance drama, involved dancers from Siwela Sonke and PDC and four classical Indian dancers. Pather blended European, Indian and African dance and musical traditions to celebrate the triumph of the struggle against racism and “the influence of Gandhi in the development of the concept of passive resistance and the merging of this movement with the ANC.” (Pather, **Sunday Tribune**, 1996)

The title of the work refers to the Hindi word, ahimsa, for non-violence “which is linked, in this theatrical quest for cultural identity, with the African concept of ubuntu (humanity).” (Sichel, **Daily News**, 1996b) Sichel described what Pather did in the piece as working “with dance forms as languages against a backdrop of iconic historical photographic or filmic images.” (**Daily News**, 1996b) She eloquently explained this cross-cultural journey into South Africa’s past:

...in tracing hundreds of years of South African history pirouettes replaced gunshots...tap dance and gumboot routines depicted the rise of racism and the defiance campaign...lyrical classical Indian dance responding to the toyi-toyi represented Soweto on June 16 1976. (**Daily News**, 1996b)

⁶² Sichel, **Daily News**, 1996b. Please refer to Appendix C, Article Three, p.103 for Sichel’s review.

These dance forms and others were presented in their pure form and in cross-pollinated fusions. Yet Pather, speaking to Sichel, stressed that he “was anxious to keep the forms with their centres.” (**Daily News**, 1996b) His insistence on authentic or original steps linked to particular contexts, granted the work integrity so that it did not fall into the trap of “mix[ing] and match[ing] cultures as if they were nothing more than ingredients of nouvelle cuisine.” (Copeland, DTJ, 1992 : 43) As Sichel commented, this production showed that informed borrowing from other cultures allowed us access to them. Lynn Maree, speaking at a conference on dance and music in Cape Town last year, put forward a case for the re-invention of ourselves:

...away from the imitative and impositional worship of things European and American, without switching then to worship of a stereotyped, idealised Africa. We need to stand tall, and from that position of strength and confidence borrow, steal, discard. Neither the cultural strut nor the cultural cringe⁶³ ... (Confluences proceedings, 1997 : 147)

Ahimsa Ubuntu embodied a coming together of many forms to create something new, a common language that could be tapped into. As Gita Pather explained:

Jay took the emerging dance styles and merged it with a word-theatre to create something new. We haven't had a dance theatre here. We've had contemporary and classical and the rubbing off of one culture sometimes to the detriment of the other culture. (Personal Interview, 1997)

3.7 Testimonies to our past and present

The launch season carried the spirit of *Ahimsa Ubuntu* a step further with five diverse pieces of choreography, but all linked by the common thread of South African-ness and fuelled by the desire to:

recreate our [South Africans'] histories and re-find the rich myths and legends of marginalised people whose lives thus far have been inadequately represented in South African theatre.

(Pamphlet from the Natal Playhouse on Siwela Sonke, 1997)

⁶³ The cultural cringe refers to the tendency of South Africans to prefer anything from abroad and reject anything local.

Two pieces in particular spoke volumes about where the company are now and where they are going: *Testimonies* and *And then she blew in*, both choreographed by Pather. The first is a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: a white woman and a black man partner each other to actual narration of testimony by two other members of the company. Sichel explains in articulating her response to the piece:

The stereotypes rattle into place. Dominant European repressive presence, high legs and technique versus oppressed black man, deprived African dancer. Its the quality of touch and *pas de deux* interaction, the sharing of weight, the mingling of emotion that fast-changes that perception. The lines are blurred.
(**The Star Tonight**, 1997a)

Pather's passion for expression as well as execution is clearly exhibited in this piece, as is his clever use of eclectic styles to convey a message. He also challenges his dancers to speak, sing and create individual gestural vocabularies, as is evident in *And then she blew in*, which concentrates on the abuse of women. The trigger for the piece comes from a report Pather read: "A woman, after years of abuse, packed a suitcase in the middle of the night, and walked away." (Programme note, April 1997) Sichel's description of the piece read:

This dramatic portrait of wife abuse intimately stitches traditional elements like Zulu stamps into an expressive choreographic language. Each character comes alive in a seedy bar. (**Star Tonight**, 1997a)

Pather is sending out a message with his work, as is Magazi: that we must not be afraid of experimenting with each other's cultures and heritage. Dance-makers (indeed any artists) should be able to cross comfortably to other creative places:

We are - or at least ought to think of ourselves as - a world of immigrants, granted no fixed culture, but nonetheless granted a great deal of it continually to remake. (Peters, 1995 : 210)

Turning towards a concern as to whether the launch of the company had been perceived as a positive move, two people had pertinent and enlightening views. Moller, speaking in her capacity as a publicist working for the Playhouse, said that the media had been very supportive

but this may have had something to do with Siwela being a company for the “new” South Africa:

...something like *Medley*...quite blatantly plays with aspects of the different cultures and brings them together in a unified rhythm. It's a very transparent metaphor. (Personal Interview, 1997)

What is very apparent is that the creation of another company is a vast economic risk for the Playhouse to take with audiences as they are. However, as Nicky du Plessis points out, it is a risk that has to be taken:

Only by having a company that is exploring new ways and differences, creating new dance vocabularies (that are not always succeeding), it is laying the foundations and building up so that there is a solid base on which things can take place...It's a demonstration of a commitment to accessibility and transformation... (Personal Interview, 1997)

Gerard Samuels, when asked if the Playhouse could support two companies, commented that the work of both the PDC and Siwela have value. His concern was that one should not be played up against the other. The fact remains that they fulfil different functions within the broad spectrum of change and transformation; an opening out has occurred within the dance department and adventure has been invited in through an open door. Both companies are interacting with shifts and differences in contrasting ways, and the Playhouse Dance department is acknowledging the worth of both. Roger Copeland puts this view into perspective in an article that focuses on contextualising the promoting of cultural diversity. He uses the examples of the Black Swan and the Whirling Dervishes, commenting on the fact that “ballet is frequently among the first casualties of the new multi-cultural mandate,...” (DTJ, 1992 : 12) The challenge, he adds:

...is to devise a canon that will include *both* the Dervishes and the Black Swan, rather than crudely informing the Black Swan that its time she moved out of the spotlight so as to make room for the dervishes. (Ibid)

In reply to the following question - is there still room for the classics to be revived and preserved under the present mandate at the Playhouse Company with so much emphasis on

development work? - Gita Pather states that:

...everything has its place but one art form should not survive at the expense of another. We want the ballet and the orchestra and the opera but we also want isicathimiya and maskanda...I think as a region we have the most diversity to create something that is truly South African. If we're moving towards a multi-cultural society then we have the richest breeding grounds. (Personal Interview, 1997)

The challenge remains, as ever, a formidable one. Both Hawkins and Pather grapple with the concept of culture and all its manifestations. They are inventing manifestos as they go, interacting with the vast tremors of change that are tipping the world of theatre into debates and new areas of discourse about ownership and access. Perhaps they could adopt Julie Peters' stance as their credo:

Who owns culture? Who inherits it, from the moments of celebration to the documents of barbarism? Nobody, of course. For when one inherits, one inherits a global collective web, a web not concentric or symmetrical, but connected in all its parts (even if no one is privileged with seeing all parts of it at once), a web which one is meant, indeed bound, to reweave. (1995 : 210)

CHAPTER FOUR

FORGING AHEAD *WITH ATTITUDE*

Reflections on transformation

The Playhouse Company has, since 1993, been undergoing a process of examination, dissection and restructuring. Transformation is an ongoing operation that cannot be a quick-fix or be expected to bear fruit that is free of all the blemishes of the past. Jay Pather attempted to express a personal view of the changes that are being made. He was speaking from the position of one who is involved closely with the machinations of a company as vast as the Playhouse. He emphasised that things are working at the Playhouse because they began before the elections. Some of the other arts councils are flailing now because they have resisted the forces of change. The work of the Education and Development department at the Playhouse has been a major contributor to transformation. The problem of funding, however, remains the greatest obstacle. Commercially viable productions are needed to balance the books and, according to Pather, a more coherent artistic policy is necessary. As is often the case, optimistic visions and ideas are not implemented satisfactorily.

4.1 Visions put into practice

Pather noted that there will invariably be tensions between creating policies and the actualities of implementing them. "The reason for that being that the Playhouse Company is being enormously brave in taking on visions and policies that would not in the past be considered." (Pather, Personal Interview, 1997) Yet the "balancing of books becomes a

monster in itself” as Pather explained:

The Bolshoi Ballet balanced the books because they were sold out...but those productions that are searching for artistic integrity are being outweighed by commercial productions such as *Elton*⁶⁴. The odds are so huge when you are up against something like *Queen at the Opera* where the intellectuals and academics are supporting that before coming to see Siwela perform. Their frame of reference becomes so small. If you give them [the audience] the Bolshoi, *Elton* and *Queen* all the time that’s all they want...They [Playhouse Company] must be more brave and keep their artistic integrity.
(Personal Interview, 1997)

Clearly one of the most entrenched stumbling blocks to putting policies into practice remains the white public’s eurocentric view of culture which sees “South Africa’s cultural worth in terms of its ability to produce a “Die Fledermaus” which can rival the Vienna Opera,...”(Masakela, 1990 : 4) Due to prejudice and patronising attitudes, the work being done by Siwela Sonke is rejected, despite the fact that it has the potential to give us new forms and an aesthetic which is uniquely South African.

Most of the people interviewed admitted that while there has not been delivery on a massive scale, steps are being worked through systematically. Gita Pather explains the process as “being an uphill battle”, as arts practitioners are constantly trying to “respond to needs and to balance that against the fact that we are a professional performing arts council.” (Personal Interview, 1997) The word “balance” appeared often throughout various interviews lending weight to the notion that a certain amount of prudence has to be exercised if change is to be organic and long-lasting. There is a need to be both “revolutionary and conservative” (Berman, 1983 : 13), qualities which the PDC have exhibited.

⁶⁴ *Elton* was a musical tribute celebrating the genius of Elton John. It ran at The Cellar, a supper theatre venue at the Playhouse for a record number of weeks in 1997.

A policy that is beginning to have an enormous effect on the employees of the Playhouse Company is a series of workshops on Understanding Racism in the workplace. The shifting of mindsets is a necessity if real transformation is to occur:

So many of the problems with vision and implementation have to do with racism. We are so blinkered and come from years of colonialism and apartheid. It's not going to take just a few years to get rid of this. (Pather, Personal Interview, 1997)

Gita Pather emphasised that attitudes towards women also had to change. Her vision of the Playhouse hosting a Women's Arts Festival bore fruit in 1996. Intended as an ongoing fixture in the annual events, the 1997 festival was scuppered when a major sponsor withdrew. But Ms. Pather is undeterred; she intends to fight for one in 1998.

It is evident that visions and their implementation in the dance department are moving along the same path of broadening horizons. Moller and Samuels explained that there is a very clear strategic plan at the beginning of each year that is followed carefully⁶⁵. Projects such as the *Young Choreographers' Season* (1996); *Come Dance With Me* for disabled schools (1996 and 1997); performances on the Transnet truck at events such as the Chatsworth Fair (1997) and Siwela Sonke have all exhibited policy and practice going hand-in-hand. Added to this is the PDC's commitment to providing diverse seasons of dance as well as an awareness of its educational responsibility of building up a new, young audience.

4.2 Taking transformation further

This section offers some thoughts on how the Playhouse dance department could take their efforts further. Inspired by the **Moving Into Dance**⁶⁶ company in Johannesburg because of its response to the climate of change, some of its projects will be discussed as possible ways of interacting further with the concept of arts for all and cross-cultural training. This will

⁶⁵ See further comments by Moller on implementation of projects in Appendix A, p.93.

⁶⁶ Hereafter referred to as MID.

hopefully provide “food for transformative thought”, bearing in mind the vastly different histories and biographies of the PDC and MID. These suggestions take into account the serious shortage of money available to launch new projects and the uncertain future of the dance company. They should in no way detract from the positive, enlightened alterations that have already been made within the dance company and department to date.

In 1933, Lincoln Kirstein wrote to George Balanchine asking him if he would come to America to start a ballet company. Balanchine replied: “But first, a school.” (*Ballet Review*, 1983 : 17) Hence the School of American Ballet was created, which was a source of dancers for the New York City Ballet and operated as a training ground for students. The significance of this to the discussion is in drawing attention to the need for a school of dance in Durban that can feed a professional company. Current dance trends in the region show an abundance of ballet, modern dance and Spanish studios. One studio offers jazz dance classes and there are also some folk, Indian and ballroom dancing studios. Dance is therefore being taught as “a closed text” (Hagemann, *DJ*, 1990 : 10) disallowing an inclusive view. All these cater mainly for schoolchildren with little on offer for adults and almost nothing in the way of training for students who eventually want to make a career of dance. The studios operate mainly in isolation to one another with marginal sharing of resources and knowledge. Brinson articulated a concern that the notion of dance power⁶⁷ can only come to fruition if “dancers and dance teachers of all styles and cultures work together.” (1993 : 3) It is only through the expression of a collective voice that the case for dance can be furthered.

The Natal Technikon and University of Natal (Durban and Pietermaritzburg) drama

⁶⁷ Peter Brinson gave an address entitled *Dancepower* in Durban, 1993. He describes dance power as “a central concept of a politics of dance...ways in which the dance world can persuade politicians and administrators to give dance its fair share of national resources.” (1993 : 3)

departments offer dance within their curricula, but this is being threatened by the current shake-up occurring at tertiary institutions where drama departments are threatened with extinction. The students in these three departments are exposed to a range of dance forms with the opportunity to work with guest lecturers and to present work at dance festivals such as Dance Shongololo. If dance is eliminated from the syllabus the students will be unable to learn about not only the theory and history of dance but also the practical aspects of choreography and performance. There is a sad enough lack of training centres for aspirant dancers and it therefore comes as no surprise that many of the dancers who have gone through the former NAPAC Dance Company and now the PDC came from other parts of the country. If the PDC is disbanded and the drama departments at the universities disappear, there will be no artistic amateur and professional work at all.

With this background to a very real dilemma in mind, a brief study of MID and its integrated approach to education and performance will suggest a successful model which, in ideal circumstances, the PDC could emulate. MID was established in 1978 by Sylvia Glasser as a non-racial dance company. Her passion for African dance and her explorations into cross-cultural and fusion work has fuelled the direction of the company. She also believes that it is not enough to be a performer alone and the members of the company are trained as teachers as it is “necessary to put something back into the community...a dance company needs to be reciprocal.” (Glasser, Personal Interview, June 1997) MID is multi-faceted: it consists of the performance company, a community dance teacher’s training course, outreach programmes and part-time dance training. Glasser has been, as she puts it: “doing transformation since the early 1980’s.” (Personal Interview, 1997)

Many of the MID aspirant dance company members have graduated through the Moving Into Dance School which offers part-time dance classes encompassing three areas: vocational and performance training for adults and teenagers, children's educational dance classes and recreational dance classes for adults and teenagers. These have been running since 1978 and generous sponsorship has provided scholarships and bursaries. The classes for adults and teenagers offer a wide range of dance forms including African dance, modern dance, creative movement, Afro-fusion, ballet and jazz. Glasser also includes choreography and performance training. Clearly the foundations have been laid here for these classes to provide a resource for the company and much-needed training opportunities for aspirant dancers. The one year community dance teacher's training course also acts as a source from which to garner prospective dancers for the performance company. The approach has been one based on making, performing and appreciating dance, incorporating practical and theoretical modules. This holistic training carries through to the performance company too as their learning takes place on a variety of levels with theory informing practical work. Glasser emphasises the integration of teacher and performer.

The company members teach the part-time dance classes as well as immensely successful outreach programmes under the title of *Edudance*. Here there is a two-pronged approach advocating the participation of pupils in classes and encouraging appreciation of dance. This is fulfilling, in part, the philosophy advocated by dance education specialists such as Adshead and Brinson, namely that opportunities must be made available for children to be involved in making, performing and appreciating dance. This is echoed in documents such as

ACTAG and the Draft White Paper that seek to implement transforming ideas on arts education.⁶⁸ Educational dance performances are created around issues related to the school learning programmes such as numeracy, literacy and environmental studies.⁶⁹ Glasser spoke about the classes:

We have eighteen schools that we teach at on a regular basis every week. The company members teach two mornings a week in addition to the Edudance teachers on the training course. So we reach approximately two thousand kids regularly. Also, unusually, most of the schools accept us in the mornings as part of the school curriculum. (Personal Interview, 1997)

The inclusion of these classes into the formal school hours integrates dance into the children's education. It is not merely tacked on as an additional extra, an hour where they are entertained by a travelling group of dancers. They are fulfilling a very real and basic need of encouraging an interest in and learning through dance. Another key issue is that the children and students are in close contact with professional dancer/teachers who are involving themselves in the needs of the community. In addition, MID members can supplement their income and graduates of the teacher's course can put their skills to use. These projects were initiated in response to suggestions by advisors to MID who are members of the community, and are in touch with the realities of township education. MID is therefore extending its role as a community-based centre.

⁶⁸ The ACTAG document states in Point 5.3.1:

"Learners should have opportunities to make, perform, and present art works, and watch, look and listen in an informed way." (1995 : 258)

This is resonated in the Draft White Paper in Chapter 4, Point 31:

"Education in arts, culture and heritage should embrace opportunities for making, performing and presenting as well as appreciating the many expressions of South African cultural heritage to realise the right of all South Africans to participate fully in, contribute to, and benefit from an all-inclusive South African culture." (1995 : 25)

⁶⁹ The form and content these programmes take are in direct contrast to those taken to schools in Kwazulu - Natal by PDC. Steinberg is vehement when writing about arts councils' outreach programmes that "arrive in communities pre-packaged,..." (1993 : 27) and "do not engage with the prevailing reality of the audiences." (Ibid)

As well as emphasising the performer-teacher role, Glasser illustrated the other aspects involved with being a member of the performing company:

It is no coincidence that MID has claimed more black choreographers than any other companies. I teach them choreography class for three hours every week so we have others, not only Vincent, choreographing. Several are learning to be administration assistants. We cannot afford a technical person or stage manager, so out of necessity they are all allotted tasks especially when on tour. Some do the PR work, others scheduling, others costumes... They also serve on committees such as Dance Alliance and educational ones. Several have their own groups who they work with such as The Creators who are doing well. Some who completed the teachers' course are in the Vaal triangle working as cultural officers. (Personal Interview, 1997)

The message is patently clear: to interact with the demands of transformation and the shifting climate of change, it is not enough to only have one skill to offer. A holistic training attitude, a multi-stranded approach to the challenges of creating dance and imparting knowledge about it, is a necessity. Some members are also being encouraged to write about dance. Thatanelo D April contributes to the **Star Tonight** and has reported on MID's tours to festivals such as the Montpellièrdanse '97 in France. In this way ideas, debate and an atmosphere of learning about dance are encouraged. MID are continually expanding on a vision, they are helping to:

redirect the conscience and fixed assumptions of people towards building new kinds of culturally diverse nationhood which will characterise the next century. (Brinson, 1993 : 10)

4.3 Re-directing thoughts on culture

This research into the transformation of the PDC necessarily interacts with the shifting ideas on the concept of culture. The PDC's history is entrenched in a particular view of culture; its present and future embraces a different set of values. Discussion documents set out specific definitions of what the word culture embodies for the purposes of a new dispensation and attitude towards the arts in South Africa. Cultural theorists internationally grapple with the connotations attached to the term. The belief here is not that definitive

conclusions are arrived at, but rather that ideas are thrown up into the light in an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the atmosphere in which the PDC's transformation, and subsequently its identity, is operating.

Theatrical traditions in this country have "evolved in a relatively stable framework due to the strong eurocentric socio-cultural context provided by the rigid political structures."

(Hutchison, SATJ, 1996 : 35) Sachs argues the point:

I find that our so-called white culture is not something that we live and feel, but something that we accumulate and play with. Hence our obsession with received standards and our defence of elitism as something worthy in itself.
(1991 : 8)

Since the demise of apartheid this rigid framework has rightly been dealt a severe blow. The notion of exclusive art forms (and mindsets) - the territory of the majority of white theatregoers - has been challenged with a more open and changeable horizon. The process should involve a "new resolute attempt to end concepts of officialised taste and institutionalised performance." (Sachs, 1991 : 1)

The Draft White Paper has laid out a definition of culture that had its forerunner in the ACTAG document. It involves a move away from the "over-familiar to the under-familiar" (Sachs, 1991 : 1), to a rediscovery of what it means to be a South African. It does not deny the right to enjoy the so-called "high" arts but there must be an acknowledgement that they are not the **only** arts, "the sun around which the whole cultural universe revolves." (Masakela, 1990 : 4) Embracing an inclusive view of culture allows an open acceptance of difference and diversity and encourages a crossing of the ways rather than the "cultural cringe" syndrome that has characterised our understanding of culture in the past.

The PDC and dance department have been given the opportunity of interacting with this altered vision of culture and are existing in an ever-changeable environment. They can no longer harbour a single identity, a colonial ballet company, but are attempting to grasp the harsh realities of becoming a manifold, many-sided entity. This is evident in their willingness to offer something to all spheres of the community, be it through the performance of ballet seasons, contemporary dance seasons, offering their skills as teachers, choreographing for children or initiating projects like Siwela Sonke. The journey towards transformation is a difficult and arduous one and the final destination – if there is one – is not in sight yet. This research has merely captured the process in continual motion and conveys a sense of the complexity and challenges of re-directing and re-channelling thoughts and energies into a new mode⁷⁰. The PDC seems to be learning “to respect and value what is around us – what was lost, what survived and what is developing.” (Sichel, *Star Tonight*, 1997b)

CONCLUSION: Back to basics...

Where to now for the PDC and subsequently the dance department? The future is uncertain. Numerous meetings have already taken place in the first month of 1998, conferences of worry as to where the money is coming from to keep the dance department alive for another year. There is however one constant star in the troubled firmament: the absolute commitment to survive and continue the journey that has been started. To this end, PDC and Siwela Sonke will be performing at the 10th Anniversary of the FNB Vita Dance Umbrella in March 1998 and will then feature in a shared season of contemporary dance at the Playhouse entitled *Back 2 Back*. The vision of opening out to an appreciation of diverse ways of choreographing and dancing in a bid to foster an inclusive dance culture is being made real.

⁷⁰ Please see Comelin's comments on PDC's attempts to adapt in Appendix A, p. 88.

Gerard Samuels shared his workable vision, many parts of which are being implemented successfully:

A dance department ought to be responsible for the arts and the dance culture that's present in the region and make sure that every one of those forms gets its day in the sun. It must be supported by various programmes - whether it needs skills programmes or with something like pantsula does it need an awareness programme...to be put on the stage at festivals...It's also about discovering new communities, about audience development. It's about going into dance in education, dance for people with special needs...The dance department would be utilising the resources of the dance company which is why it's so important the choice of an individual who comes into a company...
(Personal Interview, 1997)

This thesis has traced the routes towards an understanding of the need for change within a company such as the PDC. The company is attempting to forge a new identity that is both revolutionary and conservative. The complex notions bound up with the connotations of the word "transformation" are informing the atmosphere within which changes are happening. The process is far from complete.

This research recognises the significant role a dance company and department can play in the new South Africa. It is vital that these highly-skilled and remarkably talented people are valued and nurtured. Despite the fact that they are a small part of the population, they have a significant role to play as they continue producing high quality performances that embrace variety, diversity and integrity. Their efforts at transformation should continue to spill over into all facets of their existence, their teaching, choreographing and community work. Deborah Bull, defending the contribution of art to a nation, passionately argued:

Human beings have spiritual as well as physical needs, and whilst medication can attend to the latter, it falls to art to uplift the former.
(Opera House, 1996 : 38)

Lynn Maree weaves the threads together of a vision for the PDC's future:

We need clarity, confidence, honesty and rigour, we need to nurture talent - in all aspects of dance - and to increase the opportunities for professional careers in them. This involves the provision of access, resources, training, and infrastructure. Safe opportunities for experiment must be found - in the re-invention of ourselves there will be many artistic failures.

(Confluences proceedings, 1997 :147)

While the journey is fraught with uncertainty and much divesting of colonial baggage, the PDC is learning a tangible lesson through interacting with transformation and grappling with identity. There are few instant solutions to the multitude of questions such as "...can what we have survive, and what we hope to have, take root and flourish?"(Hurwitz, Confluences proceedings, 1997 : 119) But the route to becoming (and ultimately surviving) has revealed that "...dance at its best is not contained in suitcases but has become instead a passport to limitless travel." (Nugent, DTJ, 1996 : 2)

APPENDIX A

EXTRACTS FROM INTERVIEWS

I have selected pertinent extracts from interviews. The full transcripts are available if required.

JEAN-PAUL COMELIN (1997) on adaptation

TB: Do you think that the dancers have attempted to adapt/transform to the changing needs of the country?

COM: I think they have. They had to because of the lack of funding, they had to find a new vocabulary. Hawkins realized there had to be change. Like the rest of the world, dancing has moved from the classical to the contemporary i.e. Hawkins' *Midsummer* and my *Firebird*. The dancers have also tried to adapt especially here in Durban but perhaps not so much in Cape Town and Joburg. The Durban public does not seem to have adapted to this change- they are very conservative and steeped in tradition.

TB: How do you view the repertoire that they have? Is it indicative of the times we are living in?

COM: In short, yes. In Basle I saw them perform *Travellers*, *Explosion of the stars...* In Germany there is a lot of controversial dance- even in France and England. Whether you like it or not it is the dance of our times.

TB: What is your view on Arts Councils?

COM: Arts Councils, a ministry of culture, call it what you like, are absolutely essential. If you remove them, who will pay for art? They are important for funding. The government has to provide money for culture. It would be very sad to lose them.

TB: Do you think that ballet still has a place in SA?

COM: Of course ballet has a place in the new SA! But the rainbow colours have to be mixed more from an early age. To attract the black/indian audiences we have to work with them and integrate them. That's what the new SA is all about.

MARY-ANNE DE WET (1997) on training, output and choreographers

TB: In terms of your training processes do you do a wide range of classes?

MDW: No, we're classically based, we do classical class always. Visiting choreographers do a couple of classes with us. We sort of stay away from hardcore contemporary, it's completely opposite to what we're trained for and somehow your body doesn't get warm. Contemporary companies all over the world do ballet class every day.

TB: When you did *Travellers* with Gary Gordon how did you respond to his way of working?

MDW: I love working with Gary and I really enjoyed that. I love physical theatre, not all the time, it hurts. I identify with it quite a lot. Although there's a lot of stuff you do wrong because you're classical, there's stuff you feel you can add to because you have a little bit of training, things look a little bit different which is exciting for me.

TB: Your output or visibility seems less this year than previous years. The first time we saw you dance in Durban was in June. Do you think this is due to economic problems?

MDW: We rehearsed one ballet for a very long time. I think it is an economic thing. Last year we did a lot of touring. We try to set these tours up every year but because we had been the year before they weren't interested. There's also something happening at the Playhouse now where each department doesn't try to do too much, they don't want everything on in the Playhouse all at once. I'm not sure that I understand it correctly but they feel that by having a venue full all the time, it's splitting the audience up too much. They're trying to spread it out because we normally try and do a season wherever we can.

TB: Do you think the dance company needs a resident choreographer?

MDW: I suppose that Mark really is a resident choreographer. I feel that a resident choreographer should only do one ballet a year anyway because one will be good and six will be average. That's how it worked with Ashley anyway. I'm not saying that for everybody, if you've got Jiri Kylian that's something different.

TB: Do you prefer to have visiting choreographers?

MDW: I like it. I like to work with people I know who come back like Carter and Boysie but not all the time.

NICKY DU PLESSIS (1997) on the dance company in 1991 and education

TB: Can you explain how the dance department functioned when you first arrived in 1991?

NP: I'll give you an idea of the dance company as it was when I worked there. My first year there one of their seasons was *Ballet Classics*, which epitomised what the dance company stood for. The focus of the dance department was the company and the main activity was the co. When I started there was an acting head and then Garry Trinder came in. The emphasis was on high quality productions of classical and neo-classical ballet. In the repertoire there were a few modern pieces but mainly modern ballet; some contemporary work existed such as Val Steyn's *Jika Jika* and Sonje Mayo's *Soul of Africa*.

The running of the department was allied to the British ballet company tradition. It was hierarchical, disciplined and the parameters were clearly delineated. In this sense it was very bound and there was no crossover and everyone knew their place e.g. dancers were not asked for input or their opinions. It operated like a well-run machine that, to give it its due, functioned very efficiently. This was tied in with the ballet technique and training demanding absolute discipline. So, there was a deep division between management and workers.

In terms of education work, it was very minimal. There was a "potted" history of dance that toured occasionally (1991) and on a few Saturday mornings the dancers put on a performance in the theatre with all the trappings and the kids came in and watched. I think it was called *Step Out Dance*. I scripted something for it. But there was no interaction between the dancers and the children at all... They would only go to schools where there were proper venues with a stage and a floor.

TB: Do you think the dance department is doing enough educational work? Should they do educational work?

ND: I think they do have an educational responsibility for an audience development and a future ensuring that you have audiences' point of view, and also because all the arts have that kind of responsibility of broadening their effect. It is part of the contribution they can make to society.

TB: What do you think about the lack of support from the Durban audiences? And a resistance to contemporary work. Someone at Siwela's launch said they are ringing their own death-knell. Perhaps it's attitudes like that that are the problem?

ND: They are, but attitudes like that take a long time to change and it's not one of those quick-fix, slap-it-on-the-top solutions. Maybe with the shifts in our national education, which is more lateral and creative, there will be a change. I also don't think it's just Durban audiences specifically. It's a manifestation of a general society which hasn't been able to enjoy the arts or be a part of what they do.

The link to formal education is important because during the time I did research on performing arts education, I found that there were ways in which, particularly in America, where the state would fund particular performing arts groups as long as they produced some sort of educational component, but it couldn't just be a token component. How it worked was that the schools had vouchers to spend on any of the performing arts companies. So, in order to choose you, what you were doing had to be really amazing. This worked in a couple of ways because it meant that the state was subsidising the arts activity and also the education, and providing children with education in terms of the arts. It was a very good cyclical system, which would benefit everybody.

The arts have somehow to link with that, particularly now where what is trying to be done is redress an imbalance. We don't have a history of easy-going performing arts activity and we have to inculcate it and one of the routes is through the schools and the education system. The powers-that-be have to take it seriously and right now the arts are not high on the agenda compared to housing and water. But that doesn't mean you can't push for it and lay the right kind of plans to make it happen. I know that the teachers' functions [at the Playhouse] have grown which indicates that teachers are willing to incorporate what is available and there needs to be a development of a link there. Not maybe at ground level i.e. teacher interfacing with arts group, but where provincial administrations are putting this on the agenda and subsidising in order to feed it.

MARK HAWKINS (1996) on the company's creation in 1985 and its development

TB: When was the company formed and why?

MH: In 1985 and ostensibly to perform 20th century works. But classical ballets were all-important. It was marketed this way because of audience response and tastes and the co had money and dancers. It was definitely a ballet audience and the classics made more money than contemporary seasons but they were expensive to mount.

TB: Did Trinder turn it in another direction?

MH: He carried it along much the same lines but pushed 20th century works more.

TB: What was/is your vision for the company and what direction are you taking it in?

MH: I tried to maintain an emphasis on 20th C work and to push more original S A choreography. At the same time I think it is so important to have input from overseas in the form of choreographers such as Comelin and also to perform overseas. I see PDC as the forerunners of where dance is going. They have national exposure and are prepared to take risks. We have battled but this year the audience has increased by 18% for contemporary work. We have performed in all the major centres and overseas. We have had 7-8 seasons and toured our educational programmes. We have tried to educate audiences with open days and chats before performances. We are not a commercial company and are creating art.

MARK HAWKINS (1997) on the classics and dancers

TB: A letter appeared in the paper a few weeks ago chastising the PDC for not doing the classics. I think this was in response to the Bolshoi having been sold out. How do you respond to these types of letters?

MH: The classics are done so much. Why can't we go ahead and do new ballets? Audiences are not moving forward in the arts. A comment has also been made to the effect that "we do too much ethnic stuff". We have Mayo's *Soul of Africa* and Boysie's *Kude Nomfula*. That doesn't sound like a hell of a lot of "ethnic" stuff! Sure, twentieth century and contemporary works, yes. It is about us being able to experiment, we are artists after all. We can't afford to just churn out what the public wants. We have given in to doing *The Nutcracker* for Christmas because we have to make money. I feel that some seasons should be money-making and the rest shouldn't be. Why do we have to make money all the time? Also kids from the scholarship classes will feed into the ballet so that gives a whole new angle to it.

We are not against doing classical ballet. It has its place. Comelin's modern ballets are beautiful. While we are still subsidised we should be able to experiment. I get frustrated with the perception that we are a ballet company. We are not. We are a dance company and people in other parts of the country love seeing us perform. Durban people don't support us.

TB: Is there a lack of unity with dancers leaving and new ones coming in?

MH: No. It is sad to see people go but at the same time we get new energy from people joining us. Everybody gets a little bit complacent if they've all been there for too long without any new dynamics.

ANDREA MOLLER (1997) on identity, audiences, implementing visions and touring

TB: I'm concerned with what identity the PDC are searching for. Do you think they have an identity at the moment?

AM: In terms of the audiences in Kwazulu-Natal, PDC is the only dance company they recognise or consider. In terms of having an identity, no. I think the public would like them to be a classical dance company because those are the kinds of works that get supported. They did a season in Pietermaritzburg in March that included excerpts from *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Giselle*. Just a rehearsal was completely packed out one night. But when they do things like *Kick-Start*, the same audiences are just not interested.

TB: Why?

AM: Because, at the moment, theatre-going audiences are still predominantly white, middle-aged, upper-income and just not interested in contemporary dance for a variety of reasons. Having been involved in the Bolshoi season, I think it has a lot to do with snob value - let's go to the ballet!

TB: Do you also not think that the audiences are caught in an "Arts council mentality" and seem unwilling to move on?

AM: Very much so. And I think somehow that this is far more applicable to dance than any of the other theatre forms, because drama is taking big steps forwards and getting supported; the Puppet Company is doing really ground-breaking work and the audiences love it. In terms of the actual image of the dance company we've lost six dancers from December last year and the dancers seem unsure as to what they are and where they're going. They've lost a lot of their principals such as Boysie (Cekwana) and Andrew (Gilder).

TB: In terms of audience education I know that Mark has initiated forum discussions before performances but even those haven't been terribly successful.

AM: Mark has a little following of ladies who come to adult education classes who come to everything but the general public aren't interested. The average Joe Bloggs just wants to take his wife to see something and he's not interested in who did it and what informs the work.

TB: Should the company be able to explore and experiment or must they only provide pieces that merely entertain? The public asks for the repetition of works that are familiar but as artists they must also find new ways of saying things.

AM: *Swan Lake* was considered a revolutionary piece when it was first performed. I think initially you've got to explore and artists get frustrated when they can't. You hope that

if you push at it hard enough and long enough you will get a following...people will come around. The process of change is just very slow and laboured. The Playhouse is tolerant of and encourages new work. We know that Siwela Sonke won't be a box office success and in fact cost us money but hope that in a few years time they will have a following.

TB: Do you think there is a tension between the Playhouse's policies and visions and the implementation of these visions?

AM: I'd say they're moving along the same path. It hasn't been an easy process and I've only come into it in the last year or so. There's very clearly articulated policies which have been very successfully implemented. Possibly it was far more difficult at the outset. I started off as publicist in the Education and Development department and the work they do is very clearly outlined at the beginning of the year in a strategic plan and followed. They're doing everything from last year's *Young Choreographers' Season* to dramas being taken to the communities. They stage them on the Transnet truck and go out to schools... The policy and practice go very much hand-in-hand. As far as the dance company is concerned, things are a little less clear on paper but, for example Siwela Sonke was an education and development initiative which has proved very successful. PDC does considerable education work; they have a school's programme that they take out...

TB: But Mark says there has been built-up resistance to this, especially dancing on unknown territory etc. Sometimes they go out on the truck, but it seems there hasn't been a lot of this going on.

AM: Yes, they don't do a lot of it. They normally choose a venue with a stage...

TB: But doesn't that defeat the object. Part of the joy of watching was that you performed on the hall floor or the courtyard in close proximity to the children. It seems sometimes that something is lost when one keeps trying to present it in a way that is known.

AM: I agree with you but it is further limited by the kind of work that the PDC do. The girls largely perform *en pointe* so need a sprung floor and a proper platform... They have done programmes like *Boogie on Down* in takkies but they always try to present this side-by-side with something like the *Puss-in-Boots pas de deux*. The PDC probably consider this to be a good feature on a school's programme. It presents the classical vocabulary but with it comes limitations such as a sprung floor.

GITA PATHER(1997) on audiences

TB: Are you positive about audiences picking up?

GP: Absolutely. I go out with the truck and see kids enthralled by it. It's not that people don't care, it's just that they've never been exposed to it, or had enough money, or transport. We work at all those levels. I'm always talking to the DTMB about lifts to shows so it's developmental in a monumental sense. There's no infrastructure in the townships and places that affirm the arts, where people can go and practise it and learn

skills. It's a long-term thing. South Africa has a natural theatre-loving audience, African people have appreciation and they're really starved for it and Indian people. We have to be very focused and aware, setting goals. We have to be market-orientated. I don't mean give people only what they want, but give them what they want and slip in everything else we think we're educating them with. I personally don't think that we should cater to the tastes of people because their tastes are banal and easily satisfied. I think artists must be there to do more, they must provoke and challenge them. But there must always be integrity and communication.

JAY PATHER (1997) on arts councils, training and survival

TB: Reading through some of your articles written in the early 90s, you were very critical of arts councils. What has made you change your mind about them as you are working for one now?

JP: My first experience was with CAPAB. I couldn't bear the structure and the only transformation they were involved in was with Jazzart and we were kind of a little sideline. The Playhouse is a different kettle of fish and there was already a lot of dismantling of old structures that goes on. I'm not uncomfortable working within a structure like this. There is enough going on together with all the dead wood to feel that there has been enough of a change.

TB: What do you see to be the role of a dance company or dance department in the new S.A?

JP: Two things: in the past, in a dance department, it has been about mounting the ballet. It will be severely misdirected if it doesn't have, together with a producing policy, a making policy, an experimenting policy, an integrating policy, a policy that is more directed towards developing. In this time of transition that's the problem with the company as a whole. There is a need for a much more humble approach with regard to the kind of productions we do. This is very long-term but I would mount more productions in 503 [one of the rehearsal studios] and let the stuff be created. Make this kind of policy but not a one-off policy; we need something that is substantial. In that way a dance department in an arts council now will be serving its full purpose.

At this point every single creator is trying to figure out what their artistic purpose is and what the hell the audience wants. It is very confusing because we have different audiences and sometimes you need to lead the way and sometimes you need to follow. We can call this a state of chaos but I prefer to see it as an opportunity. With the kind of President and constitution we have, we have the power, with very specific briefs to take up the challenge. It is about not fearing the new, about not fearing the possibility of all kinds of things happening. It is the seeking out of things that are going to develop over time, not the quick-fixes. It has to be organic. In the past we had a formula because we knew the audience and we would do something appropriate. I am sure those audiences are still around but there is fertile ground with the newer audiences.

- TB: With somebody like Clare Fourie [a member of Siwela Sonke] who has had only ballet training, I don't think you ask her to throw that all out the window but how does she respond to the release work?
- JP: Clare has come a long way. I like eclecticism. I like the fact that in *Testimonies* they all strike the right *arabesque* - that line comes from somewhere. I like to just put weight behind it and get it to where I want it to be. It's made Clare a lot more grounded and made the meaning of the technique more clear to her. How to use technique expressively. She has to let go of so much, many years of holding.
- TB: The issue of funding is tied up with survival. How are you remaining afloat?
- JP: We will be around as long as there's funding for productions. It's very dicey but I'm really confident. If we didn't continue to get funding I would despair because we have used the money well. I understand the devolving of the performing arts councils and the reasons for the redistribution of money. We've not had a revolution and there is enormous pressure to deliver with very little change.

GERARD SAMUELS (1997) on NDC, ballet class Siwela Sonke and transformation

- TB: Please tell me about the repertoire of the NAPAC Dance Company.
- GS: In Ashley Killar's early days, it was a predominantly a classical ballet company - *Romeo and Juliet*, *Giselle*, *Nutcracker*. Even in the outreach work being done at that stage it was still taking classical ballet to the masses. There were a few neo-classical works that existed - Balanchine and Cranko. There was a strong classical ballet base.
- With Garry, it shifted more into 20th century modern ballet mode - *All the Sun Long* and *Concerto*. The company still trained principally in classical ballet which they continue to do to this day. They still start the day with ballet class even though they've made the shift into being both classical ballet company and strong contemporary company.
- TB: They've moved into a stronger contemporary base since about '93?
- GS: The dancers change as well, so the rep also does to suit the new dancers. Probably the most noticeable change is the period when Mark took over and Pat Durham was acting director. She largely kept the company in the same mould, didn't venture into any new realms. Garry tried to introduce and gave new scope for young choreographers e.g. *The Lab Project*. Boysie (Cekwana) began there and David Gouldie. He did have the foresight to provide a beginners platform for experimentation. Mark carried this through and as the financial situation has become more and more dire, he has had the foresight to think creatively and utilise what's here. You create the opportunity for artists to express themselves. It's up to us in the administration side to be visionary and help young talent to grow.
- TB: What is your view on the training processes of PDC i.e. ballet class every day?

GS: I may be from an old school but I am in awe of the technique that a good classical ballet class can give a company and the contemporary dance companies all over the world continue to do this. It's also survived for close on 300 years so there's value in it. I think the real twist is the quality of the teaching.

TB: Do you think the company get enough contemporary classes?

GS: There probably isn't enough contemporary work but there aren't enough contemporary teachers in the country that you could have here. People like Gary Gordon have their own companies. Usually when there is a contemporary work in the season the choreographer who's doing the work gives the company a class so the style of the work comes through strongly.

Lynn is trying to provide an experience with the kinds of people she brings in so the ongoing professional development of the dancers is considered e.g. Ed Salt who is a dance education specialist feeds into the company and guides them on the issues they need to deal with in the *Steps into Dance* programme. Our dancers are trained first and foremost as performers and are being asked to do a whole range of other activities and again as managers we need to develop and prepare them for these.

TB: Siwela Sonke's outreach differs greatly from PDC's doesn't it?

GS: Their style is completely different and Jay has a different vision for what he wants to say with a work - the whole cross-over issue like taking a classical Indian dance form and transposing it into a completely new context. They are more concerned with societal issues such as abuse of women, gangsterism and violence with a message. This company is also in their own development phase so that too will change. There has been a good response to *Gangster* and he has used the kind of music that will draw young people into it. It is immediate.

TB: Do you think the process of transformation has been successful thus far? Has it been enough?

GS: It sometimes feels like you're fighting a battle on many fronts. What we're trying to achieve is this three-pronged approach: skilling, presentation and awareness programmes and with each of those trying to design something that's specific for each of the communities but then governed by all your finances you have to pick and choose which ones you can actually do in one year. With *Steps into Dance* you have the opportunity for adults, community artists to come and dance.

TB: Are these classes going well?

GS: Yes but one wants to work with a defined group each term and because you're dealing with communities who are coming from deprived areas, transport becomes a problem, as does commitment. Money is the big issue and also human resources. In my proposals, my resources are largely the dance company and Siwela Sonke either acting as teachers, choreographers or co-producers. The smaller the company gets the less education and development work I can do. Even in my capacity as an administrator I'm called upon to teach here, to hold this course together there, to choreograph a last section there. I call on all my previous experience as dancer and choreographer and

teacher. I 'm not afraid to get involved and I like to think that that's why the projects have gone well. The biggest danger is to assist someone enough but give them enough rope to hang themselves...to give people a sense of worth and value without making them feel inadequate.

APPENDIX B

REPERTOIRE

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>CHOREOGRAPHER</u>	<u>COMPOSER</u>
Transfigured Night*	Staff	Schoenberg
Revolution to Tango	Furber	Piazzollo
Dark Waves*	Killar	Bartok
Apollo	Balanchine	Stravinsky
Beloved Country*	Mayo	Janacek
The Lady and the Fool	Cranko	Verdi/Mackerras
Ragtime*	Killar	Joplin
Cage of God*	Carter	Rawsthorne
Brouillards	Cranko	Debussy
Carmina Burana*	Sutherland	Orff
Other People*	Killar	Shostakovich
Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux	Balanchine	Tchaikovsky
La Valse	Killar	Ravel
Prodigal Son	Mayo	Ginastera
Elastokovich	Paepers	Shostakovich
Les Biches	Killar	Poulenc
Romeo and Juliet	Killar	Prokofiev
Selfish Giant*	Killar	Elgar
Dans van die Reen	Kindo	Reddy
Shostakovich Pas de Deux*	Nirewicz	Shostakovich
Swan Lake Act II Pas de Deux*	Ivanov	Tchaikovsky
Tritsch Tratsch Polka	Cranko	Strauss
Melodrame*	Carter	Weill
Themes from Porgy and Bess*	Genn	Gershwin
Summer Day*	Carter	Debussy
Journey*	Killar	Janacek
The Miraculous Mandarin*	Killar	Bartok
Jump*	Orlin	Naidoo
Giselle	Killar	Adam
Soul of Africa*	Mayo	Mzumba
Flower Festival Pas de Deux*	Carter	Weill
Les Sylphides	Fokine	Chopin
After The Rain	Krugel	Morricone
Peter and the Wolf*	Staff	Prokofiev
Schubert Soiree	Killar	Schubert
Spectre de la Rose*	Fokine	Von Weber
Black Swan, Swan Lake Act III*	Ivanov	Tchaikovsky

Pas de Deux Spartacus*	Van Niekerk	Khachaturian
It's This Wall Upon my Clock*	Cekwana	Various
That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles*	Orlin	Various
The Sylph: She's Dancing as Fast as She Can*	Hawkins	Chopin
Firebird*	Comelin	Stravinsky
Harlequinade*	Richards after Dolin	Drigo
Coppelia*	Killar	Delibes
The Nutcracker*	Killar	Tchaikovsky
Ballet Imperial*	Coetzee	Tchaikovsky
Requiem*	Mayo	Britten
Witchboy	Carter	Salzedo
Corsaire Pas de Deux*	Petipa	Drigo
The Woodash Stars*	Ashby	Bass
Through Black and White	Coetzee	Trad. Argentinian
Mute Art, Remaining Open To Feelings	Trinder	Mahlet
Waiter! Separate Checks Please*	Hawkins	Various
Kenshin*	Hawkins	Various
Form 1*	Coetzee	Satie
Form 2*	Coetzee	Satie
Don Quixote - The Grand Pas de Deux Act III*	Beriozoff	Minkus
Pas de Dix	Balanchine	Glazounov
Neither Fish Nor Flesh*	Cekwana	Trent d'Arby
Allegro Brillante	Balanchine	Tchaikovsky
Pie Jesu*	Trinder	Faure
Othello*	Darrell	Liszt
Troy Game	North	Bob Downes
Muddy*	Smith	Muddy Waters
Travellers*	Gordon	Kevin Volans
The Explosion of Stars...*	Orlin	
Breakfast for Whoever Wants to Come*	Campbell	Various
Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone*	Cekwana	Abrahamse/Samuel
Still*	Cekwana	Pat Metheney Group
Aurora's Wedding*	Coetzee	Tchaikovsky
Brother Brother*	Cekwana	Vivaldi
New York New York*	Samuel	Sinatra
Vicatos*	Ribbonar	Finzi
Duet on a Martial Theme*	Gilder	H.P. Dopf
Kude Nomfula*	Cekwana	Gumede
4 For 7*	Hawkins	Various
Crash Test Dummies*	Gouldie	Hard Beats II

I've Got No...But I Want*	Hawkins	Norton/Hawkins
Excerpts*	Hawkins	Original
Adagietto*	Maldoom	Mahler
The Moon in Your Mouth*	Hawkins	Veldsman
Bloodsport*	Abraham	Abrahamse/Samuel
Why Do We Even Bother?*	Gilder	Original
Interlude*	Unser	Cypress Hill & Rage
Pax Romano*	Erasmus	Against the Machine
A Midsummer Night's Dream*	Hawkins	Dimitri Tiomkin
Les Nuits d'Ete*	Comelin	Mendelssohn
		Berlioz

* Denotes Active Repertoire

This repertoire was supplied by the Playhouse Dance Department. (1997).

APPENDIX C

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

ARTICLE ONE



Children's dance celebration

PETA LEE reports on the inspiring Playhouse Youth Dance Performance Project which will bring children from KwaZulu Natal together on stage in a celebration of dance tonight and tomorrow

IT WAS an extraordinary sight. Close on a dozen teenagers, dancing around a school field with hoops and balls, grinning from ear to ear – all in total silence.

The kids were from the Kwa Thintwa School for the Deaf, in Inchanga. The reason for them dancing around? Rehearsals for the upcoming Playhouse Youth Dance Performance Project - Reachout 95.

This is the second season of its kind, following last year's highly successful effort.

The project is run under the guidance of internationally-acclaimed choreographer Royston Maldoom, whose work has been presented by major ballet and contemporary dance companies – like the Scottish Ballet and the Dance Theatre of Harlem.

For the past 11 years, Maldoom has concentrated primarily on large-scale youth dance performance projects around the world. He directed the European Youth Dance Festival in Germany shortly before arriving here last month.

Playhouse Company dancers ventured into the various regions of KwaZulu-Natal to work with young untrained dancers. Classes, workshops and discussions groups by the company dancers have introduced basic dance and movement techniques to the children, many of whom have never danced before. Each group will work towards learning a dance piece choreographed for them

by the Playhouse Dance Company members, set to Edward Grieg's *Peer Gynt*.

The end result will be a magnificent spectacle of dance and music on the Playhouse Opera stage beginning from June 23. Apart from the *Peer Gynt* excerpts, the programme will also feature the highly acclaimed *Carmina Burana*, choreographed by Maldoom, featuring the Playhouse Dance Company, Siwela Sonke (founder, director and choreographer of the 1995 Youth Dance Festival in Duisburg, Germany), and the young dancers from the region.

It promises to be a feast of colour and dance, and theatre-goers shouldn't miss it.

But what of the deaf children from Inchanga? How can hard-of-hearing, indeed, totally deaf, people, learn to dance without being able to hear music?

"They're easier to teach than hearing children," said Monique Fourie, one of the Playhouse dancers teaching the children. "Because they're used to focusing closely and concentrating on what people say to them, they actually pick up our signals faster."

"We've worked with them for three days, and it gets easier every day," added dancer Quinton Ribbonaar.

The Kwa Thintwa School dancers have had a grounding in dance already, said their teacher Thokozani Mnguni, who has run the dance groups since '86. "They were dead keen to learn a different form of dance, and they're loving this. We use sign language, lip reading, and music. And yes, believe it or not they pick up the vibrations of the music and count the beat from that."

Performances of Reachout '95 are today at 7pm and tomorrow at 2pm. Tickets are R20 with block bookings of 20 or more at R8 per person.

ARTICLE TWO

Rocketing to new heights

KICK-START at the City Hall

ONE OF THE BEST surprises of this year's festival is surely the Playhouse Dance Company offering.

Most of the audience clearly expected to see a programme of dance in the classical contemporary style that one has come to expect of this talented young company.

Surprise, surprise, an explosion of talent has rocketed the Playhouse Dance Company to new heights of creativity and versatility. Much of the credit for this metamorphosis must go to the three dynamic young South African choreographers who have created new and innovative works which allow the dancers to shine as seldom before.

The first piece in the programme, It's this wall against my clock, looks at the goings-on in the boys' dressing room after a par-

ticularly disastrous matinee and is dance theatre in its purest form.

Boyzie Cekwana's fabulous fusion of the classical, contemporary and jazz disciplines interspersed with a good dose of locker room chat is set to a selection of music so diverse as to include offerings from Bobby McFerrin and Claude Bolling.

Robyn Orlin's abstract physical theatre work, That's the way the Cookie Crumbles, came as somewhat of a shock to the balletomanes among us. This Monty Pythonesque piece could easily be titled Housewives from Hell. While seemingly disjointed this offering is in fact highly disciplined, and while not to everyone's taste nevertheless makes a very strong and often strident statement.

The highlight of the evening from a point of view of sheer entertain-

ment was The Syph: she's dancing as fast as she can. Tongue in cheek, this piece shatters the classical ballet myth. The graceful lines of the dancers hide the agonies which all dancers must suffer to attain and maintain an illusion of perfection. The piece includes a little nose thumb at a regime that can literally throw in excess of R14 million at some road show while mainstream and fringe arts are sidelined due to lack of state funding and are forced to look to the private sector for sponsorship.

Try and get to see Kick-Start, it's a wonderfully entertaining programme most of which is danced in the heavy industrial footwear of one of the company's sponsors.

★ The final performance of Kick-Start is today at 12h00

Liesel Elias

DAILY DISPATCH
10/7/96

History lesson presented in rhythm

The Siwela Sonke dance company ensures that KwaZulu-Natal pupils come to terms with their socio-political backgrounds, writes ADRIENNE SICHEL.

A S NEWLY inaugurated president Nelson Mandela pledged allegiance to his country on a giant video screen, the Playhouse Opera Theatre erupted in a roar of recognition. These were the voices of 1100 pupils from Chatsworth, Phoenix, Umlazi and the Durban district, who were about to take a multi-media history lesson through narration, music, archive footage and dance.

It didn't matter that in tracing hundreds of years of South African history pirouettes replaced gunshots. Or that tap dance and gumboot routines depicted the rise of racism and the defiance campaign.

Or that lyrical classical Indian dance responding to the toyi-toyi represented Soweto on June 16 1976. The initially rowdy matinee audience viewing *Ahimsa-Ubuntu* was totally absorbed.

Such was the response they could have been grooving with Michael Jackson or Boom Shaka, but instead they were getting down with their own socio-political histories.

The journey began with the Mandela inauguration on May 10 1994 and ended 110 minutes later with a cross-cultural curtain call dominated by an image of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi embodies the philosophy of ahimsa (the Hindi word for non-violence) which is linked, in this theatrical quest for cultural identity, with the African concept of ubuntu (humanity).

This matinee and an evening performance prefaced an equally his-

toric event by the Playhouse Dance Department's Siwela Sonke Dance Company and guest artists, which ends this week. On the eve of the signing of a cultural exchange agreement with India, *Ahimsa-Ubuntu*, a multi-dimensional dance drama produced by the University of Natal's Institute for Black Research (IBR), which toured Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad and Madras, plays out. The South African artists are being hosted by the Indian Council for Cultural relations and the tour of India was partly sponsored by our national Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. This production was conceptualised and scripted by IBR director, sociologist and writer Fatima Meer, and was originally performed (and televised live by the SABC last year) at Durban's Springfield College of Education to launch Ms Meer's book *The South African Gandhi 1893-1914*.

Enthusiastic

The IBR specialises in recording oral history and the history of this country's disenfranchised peoples. Among the high-profile guests at Springfield College were Sonia Gandhi, widow of assassinated Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, and Jerry Matsila, South Africa's High Commissioner to India, who were enthusiastic about taking *Ahimsa-Ubuntu* to India.

President Mandela, says director Jay Pather, also expressed his wish to have this work tour the country but that hasn't materialised.

Ahimsa-Ubuntu is staged and directed by Mr Pather who, in April this year, was appointed director of the fledgling Siwela Sonke, which has a unique intercultural training and performance policy drawing on its regional cultural identity.



CULTURAL JOURNEY . . . Indentured Indian labourers arrive in Natal and make contact with Zulu culture in the South African dance drama *Ahimsa-Ubuntu* which has been touring India.

Durban-born Mr Pather, an established dancer, teacher, choreographer, actor and gay activist, has doggedly pioneered his vision of democratic dance. He studied English and African Literature at the University of Durban-Westville and is a Fulbright scholar and New York University masters graduate in theatre and dance. His only previous visit to India was in 1985 as an actor in Athol Fugard's *The Island*. While working with Cape Town's Jazzart Dance Theatre he went to Angola to direct Amandla Awethu, the ANC's cultural group in exile.

This background has empowered him to take historical material and events and refine them in the dance through a choreographic charter. "The confluence of classical Indian dance and traditional African dance, the rhythmic quality of both forms is very complex," he explained. "That is stressed to the

detriment of the abhinaya, the quality of expression.

"The semiotics are so rich in all the traditional performances from indlamu to the reed dance to isicathimiya. The problem with the abhinaya, in a venue like the Playhouse, is that these subtleties get lost. My concern is that dance is not just foot-stomping.

"I was anxious to keep the forms with their centres. The African dancers worked hard at finding the original steps. The same with the classical Indian dancers. The deeper you drill, you deepen those natural forms and things start happening at an intrinsic level. Happily, the venues in India and the final stop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, are on a smaller scale."

Basically what he does is work with dance forms as languages against a backdrop of iconic historical photographic or filmic images.

Similarly, the musical score arranged and composed by Jurgen Brauning, synthesises national anthems and melodies as diverse as Rossini's Thieving Magpie and Raghupathi Raghav Raja Ram. Narrator Trevor Draai, a Playhouse arts administration trainee, provides linking verbal narration. Thulabona Mzizi, dressed in skins and feathers and moving in African rhythmic patterns initiates the presence of the Zulus in Natal.

A quartet of ballet dancers announces the arrival of colonialism. The indentured Indian labour, a group of classical Indian dancers, crosses the ocean to Africa, led by Kathak (North Indian dance) specialist Vaibhav Oshi.

Mobilisation

Various other dance forms, and then cross-pollinated fusions of them, are juxtaposed against subsequent key historic events. Despite their bowler-hat-and-cane Englishness, Gandhi (Thabani Sibisi) and John Dube (Yise Gasa) are thrown off a train and the mobilisation of the Natal Indian Congress and the African National Congress begins.

Apart from the sensitivities of theatricalising and transposing chapters of sacrosanct history through dance (which is often sacred), on a personal level there's a whole new collaborative territory. The Kathak dancers are not used to dancing with people wearing shoes, while the gumboot dancers have to wait for the 15 minutes it takes the Kathak dancers to put on their ankle bells.

As *Ahimsa-Ubuntu* proves, the new breed of South African storyteller/history teacher takes dance class and connects with the past and the present through a rainbow of rhythms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

- Adair, Christy. Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens
London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992.
- Adshead, Janet. The Study of Dance
London: Dance Books Ltd., 1981.
- Berman, Marshall. All That Is Solid Melts Into Air
London: Verso, 1983.
- Brinson, Peter. Dance As Education
United Kingdom: Falmer Press, 1991.
- Brinson, Peter and
Crisp, Clement. Ballet For All
London: Pan Books Ltd., 1970.
- Geertz, Clifford. The Interpretation of Cultures
New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973.
- Grut, Marina. The History of Ballet in South Africa
Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1981.
- Hanna, Judith-Lynne. Dance, Sex and Gender
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- _____. To Dance is Human
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Kirstein, Lincoln. Ballet, Bias and Belief
New York: Dance Horizons, 1983.
- Nadel, Myron and
Miller, C. (eds.) The Dance Experience
New York: Universe Books, 1978.
- Orkin, Martin. Drama and the South African State
Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.
- Pavis, Patrice. Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture
London: Routledge, 1992.
- Ramsay, Burt. The Male Dancer
London: Routledge, 1995.

- Robertson, Allen and
Hutera, Donald. The Dance Handbook
England: Longman Group, 1988.
- Shilling, Chris. The Body and Social Theory
London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1993.
- Thomas, Helen. Dance, Modernity and Culture
London: Routledge, 1995.
- Williams, Raymond. Culture
Great Britain: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981.
- Woolfson, Malcolm. Pioneers and Pennies
Unpublished history of the first thirty years of the Natal
Performing Arts Council, Durban, 1993/1994.

THESES:

- Harward, Belinda. NAPAC : A Conflict in the Performing Arts
Unpublished thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
requirements for degree of M.A., University of Natal, Durban,
1995.
- Pienaar, Samantha. Boyzie Cekwana : The South African Dancing Body in
Transition
Unpublished thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for degree of M.A., Rhodes University, 1996.

JOURNALS/ARTICLES/PAPERS:

- Babha, Homi.K. Culture's In-Between (pp.53-60) in
Questions of Cultural Identity,
(eds.) Hall, Stuart and du Gay, Paul,
London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1996.
- Breckman, Robert. *Survival is an art form* in Stage and T.V., 13 May, 1993.
- Brinson, Peter. *Dancepower*. An address given at NAPAC, Natal Playhouse, 28
March 1993.
- Bull, Deborah. *A Dancer's Defence* in Opera House, No.9 (1996), 37-39.
- Carroll, Noel. *Theatre, Dance and Theory: A Philosophical Narrative* in
Dance Chronicle, 15, No. 3 (1992), 317-331.
- Copeland, Roger. *In Defence of Formalism* in Dance Theatre Journal, 7, No.4
(1990), 4-7 and 37-39.

-
- The Black Swan and The Whirling Dervishes: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Dance* in Dance Theatre Journal, 9, No. 4 (1992), 10-13 and 41-43.
- Dixon, Mike. *Should we mess with classics?* in Dance Europe, No. 12 (1997), 10-13.
- Eichbaum, Julius. *The Napac Saga* in Scenaria, Comment, 1993.
- Foster, Susan-Leigh. *The Ballerina's Phallic Pointe* (pp.1-24) in Corporealities, (ed.) Foster, Susan Leigh, London: Routledge, 1996.
- Foyer, Margaret. *Dance in the New South Africa* in Dance Europe, No. 12 (1997), p.42.
- Frege, Ilona. *An Interview with Gary Gordon* in South African Theatre Journal, 9, No.2 (1995), 97-102.
- Glasser, Sylvia. *Is Dance Political Movement?* in The Dance Journal, 1, No.1 (1990), 7-11.
-
- Transcultural Transformations* in Visual Anthropology, Vol.8 (1996), 287-309.
- Hagemann, Frederick. *The Sense of Movement: Re-evaluating Education Through Dance* in The Dance Journal, 1, No.2 (1990), 6-12.
-
- Searching for Unity under the Surface of Dance* in The Dance Journal, 1, No.1 (1990), 2-6.
- Hall, Stuart. *Who Needs Identity?* (pp.1-16) in Questions of Cultural Identity, (eds.) Hall, Stuart and du Gay, Paul, London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1996.
- Hansen, Sophie. *Funding in the Netherlands* in Dance Europe, No.8 (1997), 16-17.
- Hauptfleisch, Temple. *Syncretism, Hybridism and Crossover Theatre in a Multicultural Community* in Assaph, Section C, No.8 (1992), 161-176.
- Hurwitz, Jonathan. *Crimes and Misdemeanours* in Confluences proceedings, University of Cape Town School of Dance (1997), 109-119.
- Hutchison, Yvette. *"Access to rather than ownership of": South African theatre history and theory at a crossroad* in South African Theatre Journal, 10, No.1 (1996), 35-47.

- Josie, Neville. *True Tales from the Body* in Bual, 9, No.3 (1994), 4-5.
- Killar, Ashley. *The Dancer* in Scenaria, Special Issue, 15 May 1996, 26-27.
- Kruger, Loren. *That Fluctuating Movement of National Consciousness in Imperialism and Theatre*, (ed.) Gainor, J. Ellen, London: Routledge, 1995.
- Larlham, Peter. *The Impact of the Dismantling of Apartheid on Theatre in South Africa* in South African Theatre Journal, 6, No.2 (1992), 43-48.
- Laskin, Barbara. *Nurturing New Dance* in Dance Theatre Journal, 13, No.2 (1996), 40-43.
- Lassalle, Nancy. *First, a school* in Ballet Review, 11, No.1 (1983), 17-31.
- Levin, David Michael. *Postmodernism in Dance: Dance, Discourse, Democracy* (pp.207-233) in Postmodernism: Philosophy and The Arts. (ed.) Silverman, H.I, Routledge, 1990.
- Macaulay, Alastair. *Notes on Dance Classicism* in Dance Theatre Journal, 5, No.2 (1987), 6-9 and 36-39.
- Manning, Emma. *Editorial* in Dance Europe, No.7 (1996/1997), p.5.
- Maree, Lynn. *Black Dance: A World Apart* in The Dance Journal, 1, No.3 (1991), 1-5.
- _____. *Dance and Political Correctness* in Confluences proceedings, University of Cape Town School of Dance (1997), 143-149.
- _____. *Noah's Ark-Noah's Flood* in Dance Theatre Journal, 13, No.1 (1996), 15-17.
- Martorella, Rosanne. *Rationality in the Artistic Management of Performing Arts Organisations* (pp.95-107) in Performers and Performances: The Social Organisation of Artistic Work, (eds.) Kamerman, Jack.B and Martorella Rosanne, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983.
- Masakela, Barbara. *Culture in the New South Africa*. A speech given at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, 1990.
- Nugent, Ann. *Assets and Impediments* in Dance Theatre Journal, 12, No.4 (1996), 32-35.
- _____. *Ruling the Game* in Dance Theatre Journal, 13, No.2 (1996), p.2.

- Pather, Jay. *Everyone Can Dance* in The Dance Journal, 1, No.2, (1990), 1-5.
- _____. *Dance in Search of Commonality*. A paper presented at the Winter School, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, 1991.
- Peters, Julie. *Intercultural Performance, Theatre Anthropology, and the Imperialist Critique* (pp.199-213) in Imperialism and Theatre, (ed.) Gainor, J.Ellen, London: Routledge, 1995.
- Rubidge, Sarah. *Decoding Dance* in Dance Theatre Journal, 7, No.2 (1989), 2-7.
- Russ, Claire. *Delivering Dance* in Dance Theatre Journal, 13, No.3 (1997), 16-17.
- Sachs, Albie. *Black is Beautiful, Brown is Beautiful, White is Beautiful* in Comment, Special Number, 1991.
- _____. *A Freedom Charter for South African Artists*. A paper delivered at the Winter School, National Arts Festival, 1991.
- Sayers, Leslie-Anne. *"She might pirouette on a daisy and it would not bend": Images of Femininity and Dance Appreciation* (pp.164-183) in Dance, Gender and Culture, (ed.) Thomas, Helen, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993.
- Siddall, Jeanette. *Money Matters* in Dance Theatre Journal, 11, No.1 (1993/1994), pp.20-21.
- Sorgenfrei, Carol Fisher. *Remarks from a workshop on Fusion Theatre for Playwrights* in Contemporary Theatre Review, 1, No.2 (1994), 131-136.
- Steinberg, Carol. *Towards an Arts Council for South Africa* in South African Theatre Journal, 7, No.2 (1993), 8-83.
- Turner, Frederick. *The Universal Solvent: Meditations on the Marriage of World Cultures* in Performing Arts Journal, 12, No. 2 (1990), 75-98.
- Wolz, Carl. *Dance at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, and Some Thoughts on International Networking* (pp.99-117) in East Meets West In Dance, (eds.) Solomon, Ruth and Solomon, John, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995.
- Zolberg, Vera, L. *Changing Patterns of Patronage in the Arts* (pp.251-268) in Performers and Performances, (eds.) Kamerman, Jack B. and Martorella, Rosanne, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983.

DISCUSSION DOCUMENTS:

- ACTAG. Arts and Culture Task Group Draft Report, 1995.
- Annual Reports. Natal Performing Arts Council and Playhouse Company reports, Durban, 1990-1997.
- Draft White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage. Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Pretoria, 1995.
- ECON. Final Report of the Evaluation Committee on Napac, NAPAC, 1993.
- National Arts Coalition. Resolutions as adopted at the National Arts Convention, Durban, December 1993, Newtown : National Arts Coalition, 1993.
- National Arts Initiative. Discussion Document on Future Arts Policies and Strategies, 1993.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND REVIEWS:

These are a selection of the articles accessed for this research:

- Ballantyne, Thomas. 1993a *Contemporary NDC on show*, **Sunday Tribune**, 11 July.
- 1993b *Napac dancers mix well with Tumbuka's earthy energy*, **Sunday Tribune**, 14 November.
- 1994a *Napac dancers look forward to a year of transition*, **Natal on Saturday**, 29 January.
- 1994b *Dance Explosion a damp squib with public*, **Sunday Tribune**, 2 October.
- 1995 *Double bill brings the curtain down with aplomb*, **Sunday Tribune**, 2 December.
- 1997 *Brave and new - will it find support*, **Sunday Tribune**, 27 April.
- Coleman, David. 1995 *Dance company endeavours need support*, **Natal Mercury**, 5 April.
- 1996 *Lean dance menu*, **Natal Mercury**, 30 July.
- Cooper, Alan. 1993 *Napac faces massive cuts*, **Daily News**, 8 June.

- Elias, Liesl. 1996. *Rocketing to new heights*, **Daily Dispatch**, 10 July.
- Friedman, Hazel. 1997 *Hell in a tutu*, **Mail and Guardian**, February.
- Hathway, Debbie. 1994 *New work by Robyn Orlin for Napac Dance*, **Natal Mercury**, 3 June.
- 1996 *Keep an open mind*, **Daily News Tonight**, 31 July.
- 1997 *It was a ballet good '97*, **Daily News Tonight**, 31 December.
- Lee, Peta. 1995 *Children's dance celebration*, **Natal on Saturday**, 24 June.
- Meijer, Sjoerd. 1993a *D-Day for Napac*, **Daily News**, 7 June.
- 1993b *Final curtain...or will the Napac show go on?*, **Daily News**, 8 June.
- 1993c *Soaring dance drama*, **Daily News Tonight**, 12 November.
- Sichel, Adrienne. 1996a *Dance plagued by need for structure*, **Star Tonight**, 16 July.
- 1996b *History lesson presented in rhythm*, **Daily News**, 1 November.
- 1997a *Bleeding the rhythms of the past*, **Star Tonight**, 13 May.
- 1997b *Away with the cultural strut and the cultural cringe*, **Star Tonight**, 5 August.
- 1997c *A Shongololo creeps in crisis*, **Star Tonight**, 4 November.
- Shevlin, Ingrid. 1995 *Midsummer knight's fantasy*, **Sunday Tribune**, 19 November.
- 1996 *East meets Africa*, **Sunday Tribune**, 13 October.

INTERVIEWS:

BUCKLAND, Andrew (Associate Professor in the Rhodes University drama department and acclaimed mime artist and performer extraordinaire) Interview, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, July 1996.

COMELIN, Jean Paul (French freelance choreographer and master teacher. Mounted *Les Nuits d'Ete* (1995) and *Daughters of Mourning* (1997) for PDC) Interview, Durban, March 1997.

DE WET, Mary-Anne (Dancer with NDC and now PDC for 11 years) Interview, Durban, 23 August 1997.

DU PLESSIS, Nicolette (Formerly employed as NDC publicist from March 1991 - 1993. She then became Education Officer in 1993 and in January 1994 joined newly created Education and Development Department at the Playhouse Company. She is currently an Arts and Culture Consultant for Article 27) Interview, Durban, 2 May 1997.

GLASSER, Sylvia (Artistic Director of Moving Into Dance in Johannesburg) Telephonic interview and e-mail, June 1997.

HAWKINS, Mark (Former member of NDC and currently Artistic Director of PDC since 1994) Telephonic and live interviews, Durban, 1996 and 1997.

JUBY, Rose (Consultant for Turnaround Management Group at the time of restructuring of NAPAC 1993. Then took the post of Acting CEO June 1993-August 1994 to implement reorganisation) Interview, Durban, 25 August 1997.

MAREE, Lynn (Her involvement in dance has been on the academic and funding side: she has lectured and written on dance education, administered cross-cultural projects and been involved in the politics of dance. She has worked mainly in the U.K and returned to South Africa to take up the post of Dance Director at the Playhouse Company beginning of 1994) Interviews, Durban, 1997.

MOLLER, Andrea (Formerly dance publicist for the dance department at the Playhouse. Currently publicist for Corporate Affairs at the Playhouse) Interview, Durban, 30 April 1997.

PATHER, Gita (Strategic Planning Manager for Playhouse Education and Development department since January 1994) Interview, Durban, 11 June 1997.

PATHER, Jay (Former resident choreographer for Jazzart. Currently Artistic Director of Siwela Sonke since 1996) Interviews, Durban, 1997.

SAMUELS, Gerard (Former member of NDC 1986-1994. He then took up the post of Dance Co-ordinator in the Education and Development department at the Playhouse, 1995) Interview, Durban, 5 June 1997.

VIDEO MATERIAL:

American Ballet Theatre's *Les Sylphides* (1984)

PDC's *New Directions* (Opera Theatre, 1993)

Explosion of Dance (Opera Theatre, 1994)

Kick-Start (Drama Theatre, 1996)

Siwela Sonke's Launch Season (Loft Theatre, 1997)

DOCUMENTATION:

Evaluation reports on Education and Development initiatives for 1996 and 1997 courtesy of Samuels.

Information on the repertoire, press releases and profile of company courtesy of the Playhouse Dance department.

Observation and documentation of selected classes, rehearsals and performances.

Moving Into Dance profile courtesy of Sylvia Glasser.

Programmes from selected seasons:

- ~ *Expanded Horizons* (March 1993)
- ~ *New Directions* (November 1993)
- ~ *Explosion of Dance* (September 1994)
- ~ *Playhouse Dance Company's 10th Anniversary Gala* (April 1995)
- ~ *Les Nuits d'Ete and A Midsummer Night's Dream*
(November/December 1995)
- ~ *With Attitude* (February/March 1996)
- ~ *Kick-Start* (July 1996)
- ~ *Reach Out '96* (August 1996)
- ~ *Siwela Sonke Launch* (April 1997)
- ~ *Kicking Air* (June 1997)