

The London Ballet Circle

Richard Chappell and Friends

Monday 4th November 2013
Dragon Hall, WC2

Host Istvan Lengyel introduced what proved to be a fascinating evening of practical demonstration and insights into the world of choreography. Richard Chappell is not only a student at Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance but also runs his own company, Richard Chappell Dance (RCD). While Richard is a dance student at Rambert, his passion is choreography and so the audience watched as he created a piece on Kai and Fiona, two members of his company.

Two and a half years ago, aged 16, Richard left the Tring Park for the Performing Arts School and created Horizons Dance Theatre, which has now become Richard Chappell Dance. Richard admits to having an investigative mind and a desire to push his own limits by distorting and twisting dance in his own way. By setting up his own company, he was able to stay in touch with and devise work with like-minded fellow students. Kai, Assistant Director of RCD, and Fiona, are both students, Kai at Central School of Ballet and Fiona at The Royal Ballet School. The close connection both as friends and creatively between the trio is obvious.

Richard has moved away from traditional classical ballet. He defines himself as someone who likes to 'balance on the fence'. He is a contemporary dancer but classical in physiology and technique. However, classical dancers without a unique and visceral physicality don't fit in well with RCD's repertoire. Gender balance is not an issue for RCD but Richard is meticulous about his male dancers having a suitable physic and a talent for break dancing while the female dancers need a more classical element. Ultimately, each dancer should 'dance their own uniqueness'.

Richard demonstrated his creative and collaborative process by setting a task to create solos on Kai and Fiona.

While the solos were being created, Richard explained where he finds inspiration for his choreography. His ideas come from literature, painting, history and scientific research. When he comes to the studio, he comes without any pre-conceived concepts for the choreography. That comes with the dancers there. He believes in giving the dancers freedom to develop his ideas on the music and he encourages them to break stereotypes. Music is a very important in adding detail to the piece and matching his 'stimulus'.

Kai and Fiona demonstrated the solos they had created. Richard then refined the solos and then created a duet from them. When asked about working with Richard, both Kai and Fiona said that at times he suggests moves that are physically impossible but through hard work and improvisation, they create the piece. Then they work on the emotional connotations in order to express the artistic intent of the piece. The work is recorded in writing and on film.

Being Artistic Director of Richard Chappell Dance is not all about choreography. Richard must also fundraise, arrange performances and perform all the other administrative duties that go along with running a business. In 2013, RCD staged a performance at The Arts Depot and Richard's choreography was danced at The Linbury Theatre. Future projects include - a short film sponsored by Dance South West in a Skate Park in Exeter in collaboration with two dancers, a BMX Rider and professional dance photographer Kevin Clifford; two commissions for classical ballet company Murley Dance; one commission for English National Ballet Youth Company; Cradle, RCD piece to be performed at Rambert School in June; two educational intensives in Devon, one in May and one in August; a workshop in London in June; NightRide, a full length piece to be filmed on Haytor in Devon in July; residency for a new piece in November 2014 at Dartington Hall, performance at Dartington Hall and, perhaps, London. Richard has received funding support from Bulfin and Co. Solicitors and the London Ballet Circle. He has also raised funds by teaching workshops in the South West and London. This was all very impressive to the members of the audience when they realised that Richard is only 18 years old.

To the delight of everyone present, the evening finished with Kai and Fiona demonstrating the finished duet that Richard had made on them.

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