

Meet Marc Brew

Marc Brew is an Australian dancer whose life opened up when we asked himself what dancing could be for him after his 1997 car accident. He shared his insights at a recent panel at Restless Dance Theatre where disabled artists who have all been influenced by the work happening in the UK talked about their journeys and insights. The panel was chaired by Sally Chance and included Jo Dunbar, Gaelle Mellis and Phillip Channells.

Marc grew up in a small country town and moved to Melbourne where he trained and worked with the Australian Ballet and later, the South African Ballet Company. At that time, he had never come across an people with disabilities, but all that changed when he became a quadriplegic, he told the audience, luckily recovering the use of his arms.

His new perspective from a wheelchair led him to look inside and re-evaluate what dance meant to him. Did it just mean feet and legs and skills? What Marc came to was that dance was expression through movement. But this conclusion just led to more questions. He had to look outside the box to find other ways this could happen as a disabled artist. His journey has sparked his interest in the art of adaptation, not only for himself but through working with people with a variety of disabilities. Marc told the seminar that as you learn new skills through teaching people, you learn to think quickly and develop new choreographies that suit dancers with diversity.

Marc moved to the UK 6 ½ years ago, as he felt there were not enough opportunities in Australia for him. He also spent some time in New York. He joined CanDoCo where he had a chance to work with great choreographers and felt that as part of an integrated dance company, they were also able to educate these mainstream leaders in dance into the value of including dancers with disabilities in their companies.

He spoke about his current interests in choreography as moving beyond direct interest in exploring disability issues to moving into outdoor work and exposing his company to much larger audiences. As for his new Assistant Director role in the Scottish Dance Company, it is the first time that a person with a severe disability has been given this leading artistic director training role and Marc hopes this will need to more opportunities for himself and others over time.

Philip reminded the audience that there were over 40 companies and many independent artists in the United Kingdom making dance and theatre work with disabled artists. Marc said this greater concentration of numbers meant that many more people were acting as ambassadors for change, people who created great work and this gave the whole movement a stronger voice.

Others in the panel commented on the strong emphasis at the younger level and a greater community dance culture. Gaelle Mellis noted that many regular dance classes have access symbols on their brochures which are encouraging disabled dancers to attend mainstream classes, knowing they are welcome. Marc said how encouraged he had felt in the UK in contrast to Australia where he had felt alone and exposed. The 2007 UK DDA strongly enforces a rights culture across the board, in buildings, in employment, education and in the arts, is monitored and endorsed by the Arts Council.

He believes that the accident has truly changed him for the better as he still has the traditional 'perfect' culture of expectation from his early dance training, but he has gone deeper into visual and verbal elements and found ways of adaptation. He is excited to continue the exchange in the arts where he can keep learning as he brings more awareness to the wider community of what is possible when everyone is included.