

Nevanlinna/Stamper

What remains..., 2021

Performance/Installation

Stephen Christopher Stamper

As an artist, I have long been interested in the idea of sound as a ghostly presence, a haunting, a fading/faded memory...

Nine years ago I watched the dancer Joe Moran perform *At Once* by the choreographer Deborah Hay at Toynbee Studios, London. While watching the performance, I suddenly became aware of the squeaking of Joe's shoes as he moved across the stage. I began to ask myself, 'What would happen if I closed my eyes for the remainder of the performance and just listened? Would I still be able to follow Joe's movements? If I choose to ignore the visual elements of a dance performance, what remains?'

Reflecting on the experience later that night, I wondered if it was possible to capture the physical presence of a dance performance in an audio recording? Dance has long been known as an ephemeral art form, with most attempts to document it—text, photographs, video recordings, et cetera—focusing primarily on the visual. As part of the course I was studying at the time, I was introduced to a technique known as binaural recording. This technique mimics the natural hearing cues created by our head and ears, creating the impression of three-dimensional sound when listened to on headphones. Immersed in the experience, the listener feels like they are there at the moment of recording. This, to me, felt like the perfect technique for capturing the fleeting and elusive physical presence of dance.

At first, I thought I would ask Joe if I could make a binaural recording of his performance of *At Once*. Then I thought, 'Why work with an existing piece of choreography, especially one that was meant to be experienced visually? Why not collaborate with a choreographer and dancer, and develop a dance piece designed solely to be listened to?' Therefore, I began to look for artistic collaborators from the world of dance and choreography interested in helping me develop this idea further.

After posting a call on Dance Info Finland's notice board, I was contacted by the dance artist Vera Nevanlinna. Vera was inspired to get in touch by my reference to the choreographer Deborah Hay. Having worked with Deborah since 2006, Vera told me that she 'totally understood' how I 'got the idea to make an audible dance piece from HER [Deborah's] work. She really is working with time and space, and that IS music.'

Our first meeting raised some interesting questions that left us both feeling very excited about the creative potential of this idea. For example, how do we ignore the visual bias inherent in choreographing movement and train our ears for dancing? How will concentrating on the sound of our movement affect the way we move? What type of movement or figure will be aesthetically appealing to the ear?

We plan to get into a dance studio as soon as we can, so we can begin to listen closely to the sound of Vera's body moving in space and discover what it means to choreograph a dance meant solely for the ears.

Throughout the development process, we will both make exploratory recordings using a set of in-ear binaural microphones. As an artist who works primarily with sound, I am interested in the shifts of perspective one can achieve with recording and editing techniques. I am particularly curious to see and hear how the simple act of swapping the aural point of view from the audience to the dancer and back again will affect the listener.

To gain valuable feedback, we plan to hold open rehearsals, research presentations and try-outs throughout the development of this piece.

In September/October 2020 we applied to Zodiac's open call for productions. Zodiac has been a showcase of new contemporary dance thinking since 1986. Their aim has always been to bring audiences together to experience new, surprising and pioneering contemporary dance productions and performances. Vera and I both feel strongly that *What remains...* will be exactly that: something new, surprising and pioneering.

As Vera is a member of AV-arkki, we also applied to be part of their *Mediabox* programme curated in cooperation with Forum Box.

Presented to the public, *What remains...* will be a haunting, a spectral trace, rather than a conventional dance performance.

My initial idea was that a single audience member would enter the performance space, empty but for a pair of headphones hanging from the ceiling in the centre of the room. Upon donning the headphones, the audience member would become aware of the sound of someone moving around them, a ghostly echo of a former performance in that very space. The recording would be on a loop and would last as long as the performance space was available, but only one audience member would be allowed in at a time.

However, Vera feels that the piece also has the potential to be presented on stage in front of an audience. The thought of a large group of people, listening intently to an invisible dance emanating from an empty stage, has us both incredibly excited!

As an artist, my primary interest is in sound, but I first fell in love with the art forms of dance and choreography at Siobhan Davies Studios back in 2011, when I took part in Lucy Cash's *Dance and Beyond: Expanding the Choreographic Field* elective as part of my BA (Hons) in Sound Arts and Design at the London College of Communication. We were lucky enough to have a short class with Siobhan herself based around her *ROTOR* piece, and since then I have taken part in Joe Moran's *Points of Departure* workshop, Straybird's short film *Walker*, and Matthias Sperling's *Walking Piece* performance installation.

Vera Elise Nevanlinna

Olen ammatiltani tanssija ja koreografi ja työssäni kiinnostunut suhteista ja niiden harjoittelemisesta. Mitä ikinä teenkin, olen suhteessa. Minun ei tarvitse tehdä mitään ollakseni suhteessa, ainoastaan huomata se. Olen suhteessa koko ympäristöön, mukaanlukien yleisön. Tanssissani ja koreografiassani ei ole kysymys minusta, vaan siitä, että harjoittelen sitä, miten olen suhteessa tilaan, aikaan, muihin (mahdollisiin) tanssijoihin ja koko ympäristöön.

Olen viimeiset kolmetoista vuotta tanssinut amerikkalaisen koreografi Deborah Hayn teoksissa ja saanut hänen ajattelustaan erittäin paljon inspiraatiota omaan taiteilijuuteeni. Hayn tanssijana toimin jokaisessa esityksessä myös teoksen koreografina tehden jatkuvasti valintoja tilan ja ajan suhteen. Työskentelemme aina kysyen itseltämme (kehoiltamme) erilaisia kysymyksiä. Yksi kysymys on ollut *What if my dance is my music?* Vuodesta 2015 olemme työskennelleet lisäksi näköaistimme kautta, tanssien ikäänkuin näköaistimme ruokkimana. Kysymys on ollut *What if I presume I am being served by how I see?* Näistä kysymyksistä käsin onkin aivan ihanaa ja hyvinkin luontevaa siirtää huomio kuuloaistiin ja tanssin tuottamiin autenttisiin ääniin. *Mitäs jos se, minkälaisia ääniä kehoni tuottaa suhteessa lattiaan, omaan kehooni ja koko tilaan, ruokkii tanssiani, tanssittaa minua?*

Valmistin vuonna 2007 adaptaation Deborah Hayn koreografiasta *News* yhdessä äänisuunnittelija Tuomas Norvion kanssa. Teoksen uudelleentulkinta oli Zodiakissa elokuussa 2020. Esiintymisasuni ja sen kautta tanssini tuottamat äänet ovat merkittävässä roolissa teoksessa. Asu on muovista ja paperista valmistettu ja se on mikitetty langattomilla mikrofoneilla. Myös tilassa on kaksi mikrofonia, jotka vahvistavat tanssini ääniä. Tuomaksen manipuloidessa tanssistani lähteviä ääniä syntyy teoksen äänimaailma ja musiikki. *What if my dance is my music?*

On hyvin luonnollinen ja inspiroiva jatkumo saada nyt alkaa työskennellä Stephen Stamperin kanssa keskittyen pelkästään autenttisiin ääniin, mitä tanssini tuottaa. On ihana ajatus luoda tanssiteos, missä itse tanssija on näkymätön, mutta hänen jälkeensä jättämä äänimaailma on se tanssi, itsenäinen taideteos. Olen pitkästä aikaa todella inspiroitunut oman taiteellisen työni äärellä ja tuntuu hyvin raikkaalta ja innostavalta alkaa paneutua näin erityiseen, tarkkaan rajattuun ja epätavalliseen tanssin osa-alueeseen. Miten tanssin, jos sen tuottama äänimaailma on liikkeen lähtökohta? Millainen liike tuottaa minkäkinlaista ääntä? En ole ikinä aiemmin tanssinut kuulemaani ja olen äärettömän kiinnostunut siitä, mitä tästä syntyy. *What if my dance is how I practise my relationship to the sound of my dance?*