

Sophie Max Interviewed by Tess Vocalina on 28 October 2022 re her role in Dancing, Trailblazing, Taboo! Eleanor Marx: A Life in Movement performed at the Bloomsbury Festival on 23 October 2023 in collaboration with students from London Contemporary Dance School.

What initially interested you in being a part of this whole project?

When Julia asked me if I was interested in being part of it, I think the fact that I didn't really know much about Eleanor Marx when I came on board to do it. It was nice to do something that was sharing a bit about someone that is not really known when she probably should be. That was the first thing that interested me.

What were your first expectations of this process and what it would be like?

I don't know if I really had expectations particularly. I didn't really know anything about what it was going to be like at all. I had no idea really going into it. I don't know if I went in with any particular expectations. I had no idea what it was going to be like.

What was the rehearsal process like for you?

I had one session with Julia before I came into the room with everyone where she told me a little bit about the character essentially and what the aims were for the piece. Then I came to rehearsal with everyone. We had another rehearsal later with just me and Amanda that was very helpful in terms of helping the both of us understand what Julia wanted to get out of the characters or out of particular moments because obviously they'd got so much going on in rehearsal. There's a lot to focus on, so we got left to our own devices, understandably, because there was so much else going on. It was very helpful when we had that rehearsal later with just me and Amanda. I came into it with everyone already there and the dancers had obviously been rehearsing. It definitely was a very different experience to anything I've experienced before. I think it took a bit of adjustment in terms of figuring out how the room worked and how the process worked. It was a very different process for me and I'm aware that Amanda and all the other actors and team that were involved, the dancers, had done it before and I hadn't, so they kind of knew what they were getting into in a way and I was completely new to it, so it did definitely take a bit of adjustment. I think it was an interesting process because, of the nature of what it was, we had to figure out all the blocking of the stuff that was going on before we could focus on the character stuff. Before Julia could focus on specifically giving us character stuff or those deeper notes. So, at the beginning, it

was very much figuring out how the piece works and how different bits fit together and how we fit all these different pieces and people into this puzzle and then only once that was done, we can be like, "Okay through this line, we want to get this out of that."

Was there anything throughout the process that you really learned and took away as an artist going forward that you think is something you're going to hold onto as a future artist continuing?

That's a very good question. This is not new but definitely something I did have to use in this particular process I guess like self-sufficiency and resilience in a way as an artist because I think, especially with such a fast process and so many different moving pieces, you do have to be very self-sufficient in terms of knowing what you're doing, figuring out what you're doing, figuring out what your character is doing when there are so many different focuses for Julia. I guess muscle memory and knowing what you're doing really well. It was definitely a good use for my photographic memory and working as a team and being responsible for knowing what you are doing yourself, but also partially being responsible especially when you're leading people that aren't yet professionals and also aren't actors, for knowing what everyone else is doing so you can guide other people. We all know as artists that you never work in a vacuum. You're always working with other people. It's always collaborative, but very much being responsible for not just yourself but also for everyone else and for knowing what everyone is doing.

I want to know what your experience was like working with the student dancers.

They were very sweet. I thought they were very nice to work with. This is always the case with students, but I think communication can sometimes be a struggle in terms of, if someone misses something, how do you make sure that everyone is responsible for catching people up. Quite a few of the early rehearsals that I was in were spent catching people up who in my first rehearsal weren't there and then were there the second rehearsal and there were different people not there. So, I think it slows down the process a little bit when there isn't that because professionals know that if someone is out of rehearsal for some reason, you catch them up and there's people who are designated to be responsible for that. That was a little bit challenging at the beginning in terms of setting up that group responsibility, but I think everyone was really lovely and keen and did really nice work, so it was fun to work with them.

What do you think going through this project, did you find to be one of the interesting things that you learned about Eleanor Marx?

I learned a lot about her, whether it's from the script itself or from my own research that I did around the script and around her. I didn't really know anything about her at first. I

obviously know a whole number of different things about her and her life and what she did with her life now that I didn't know before, so there's loads. I barely even knew she existed before.

This project is in the Women for Women project that Julia has been doing. Has this kind of work made you more curious about other invisible women from the 19th century?

Yeah, definitely. I think that it's definitely always been an area of interest for me in terms of women that don't get the credit that they should get for what they've done. That's always been something I'm interested in, but definitely I think it's something that this has made me want to look more into.

Has the context of the show and the piece itself made you think about new ideas for what theatre can be or what theatre can look like in terms of its content?

I've always been very exposed to all the different things that theatre can be. In my career so far, I've done a lot of new work and I've done a lot of various different experimental work or I've seen that work, so I don't think that's necessarily a new idea for me. It's always nice to see that being done in whatever different ways that's being done, but I don't think that's new to me in terms of what theatre can be because I've very much been in that world before.

Was there any one or two or you know moments from the process that were your favorite moments?

I think the rehearsal that I had with Julia and Amanda. That one day was definitely a memorable one. It was very useful and felt like we were hitting on something that we made some progress that we needed to make. On the Thursday, when we did it with all the costumes for the first time, was really nice when we tried on all the costumes because that obviously really helps a lot in terms of bringing a piece to life. In the performance when we sang, 'We Shall Overcome' in Yiddish, but also in English, both those moments in the show are probably the most memorable ones for me. I remember when we did that, the whole sit in moment they were doing, and then the dancers were doing as we were singing it, and then, especially in the last show with the whole huge audience, that was really powerful I think.

Thank you so much