

**Mia Crisafulli interviewing Petter Skurdal, 2nd year student from Norway at London Contemporary Dance School about Eleanor Marx: A Life in Movement
October 28 2022**

Why were you initially interested in taking part in this project?

Before I started dancing, I did a lot of acting and actually went to an acting school for my high school years. And I'm really interested in dance theatre and artists like Pina Bausch. This was a really good opportunity for me to connect with my theatre side again, use my voice, and work with text, which is something I miss while still exploring the dance which I still do every day. My main interest was to explore dance theatre, explore my roots in theatre again, and see how that can take more part of my dance education.

What were your expectations of this project?

My expectations, I guess went in very open-minded. I read a bit about the director, Julia Pascal and I looked at some of her pieces to get an idea of what I could expect from this. I was expecting very hard ensemble work and working with an ensemble, working together. I realized a lot of her performances were about telling stories. So that was something I'm interested in, always telling a story is something I try to do in dance all the time. Tell the story, not just dance for dance sake, though that is a good thing as well. I think my expectation was to see how we, as an ensemble, can work together to tell a story.

What has the rehearsal process been like with Pascal Theatre Company?

It's been very different every time. I find myself very tired every day I came into the rehearsals because I also do the full-time dance education on the side. But every time in the rehearsal, I found new energy to work with. I talked about this with another member of the rehearsals, and we were shocked. Every time we had more energy than the last time. The first couple of rehearsals were intense because you are put back or just put into this world of theatre. I feel with theatre, I feel vulnerable in a different way. We worked a lot alone in front of a whole group and really going out of your comfort zone, which then really benefited the coming rehearsals, where we worked and started working more with the manuscript instead of just working technique in ensemble work. I would say the start was really intense but really good. So, we then could dive in really deep and not be scared in the last couple of rehearsals before the show.

So, what is something you have learned that you plan to carry with you?

One of the main things is to use my voice. I had some training in this before, but coming back to it after a couple of years, I've really discovered how loud my voice can be and how much impact it can have. No matter if it's - I spoke a bit of Norwegian in the show - if it's in Norwegian or English or maybe no language at all, random things. I think it can have a big impact. I really felt it projected my vision and the story that we told. I'll definitely carry with me the use of voice.

Has this project opened any new thoughts or ideas for you and what are they, if any?

I am working on a piece right now. With the girl who just saw me on the stairs, which is probably what she was talking to me about. And it's a dance piece, but we've been talking about how we can use text because our initial start of the process was writing. We weren't really sure how to incorporate it into the piece. Maybe now, after this experience, I can find some ideas or draw inspiration from things I thought during the rehearsals. It's really giving me some new ideas on how to incorporate more speech and theatre into movement.

What is something that you found most interesting about Eleanor Marx?

The thing I found really interesting, which I didn't even realise before we did the show, was that at the very end of the play we walked around and we introduced ourselves in different languages at the end of the play. So, I introduced myself as Eleanor Marx in Norwegian. You realised this woman, and what she fought for, lives in every generation and every nationality. Because the things she fought for they pass on, and they pass through the generations. It's something we continue to fight for as the fight is never done until it's done. Even in this moment, we wouldn't do this if it wasn't for her. So, she lives on in us. She will live on in the audience. And they will tell about her to a family member or friend, and she always lives on. So that was a really meaningful moment to me, in terms of really understanding. Maybe one of the goals of the piece is to share and tell the story, and then the story can get told more times.

Has the project made me more curious about invisible woman from the 19th century?

I think it actually has. Of course, everyone's heard of Karl Marx. Then we have this Eleanor Marx. I thought she must be related to Karl Marx. As I learned more throughout the process, I think in the rehearsals where we have this bit, where we all run, and we say things she's done, and it kind of got into my head, I hadn't really realised that there was one woman who did all these things. And most of the text is explaining things she's done. And it's a 20-minute-long play. I couldn't even begin to think how one person has done all these things. She must have been so busy. So, it's definitely made me want to look more into these figures, especially women from these times who have had their stories covered or been overshadowed by other great men. I wonder how many more there are!

Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to say?

I found it really nice because I worked with some of the third years in school because I'm second year, and I found it really fun to have the opportunity to work with them across year groups. Now I can speak more with them when I see them in the halls here, so that's just a nice bonus.