

**INDEPENDENT DANCE MANAGERS' NETWORK**  
**Notes from 'New Models of Dance Management'**  
The Place, London

**Wednesday 18 April 2007**

Panel: Farooq Chaudhry (Executive Producer, Akram Khan Company), Nigel Hinds (Executive Director, The Place), Hofesh Schechter (Independent dance artist/choreographer), Gwen Van Spijk (Director, CUE). Chaired by Tim Tubbs (Director, UKFD).

TT welcomed the panel and opened the debate by positing that there are new models emerging in the dance sector and that orthodox models are having to adapt in the current environment. Policy bodies are encouraging new ways of working. Dance Management as a profession feels fairly young in comparison to other sectors – developing in the 1980s when Independent Dance was booming. The sector has grown and developed and the ways of managing and resourcing it have changed too.

**Farooq Chaudhry**

FC explained that following his training (City University and Independence) he didn't have a "strategy" but rather needed to develop a sustainable model in order to survive – starting as a sole trader and developing to a portfolio/agency model. There had been an element of picking "work I like" in terms of selecting the artist. FC explained that he had developed a relationship with Akram at a time when they were both at a parallel point in their careers. There was an essence of "fit" and a sound base for a "partnership", FC stating the language shift from "my work" to "our work" as an important moment in this.

Being opportunistic is hugely important and FC saw the ACE "underwriting of loss" mentality as potentially restrictive and as limiting the opportunistic spirit. AKC has recently developed commercial and charitable strands alongside the main company, which can feed into each other as and when appropriate.

FC suggested that the idea of the "producer" involved 5 principles: hard work; calculated risk/sacrifice; element of luck – where opportunity meets preparation; being enthusiastic about change; obsession with an idea and seeing that to fruition.

**Nigel Hinds**

NH proposed that as the environment changes, we must respond to identify new ways of working and of doing what we need to make our work happen. It is not about pre-set boxes and meeting someone else's agenda. There is an element of "horses for courses" – we change around the changing climate around us. NH described his management of the Jonathan Burrows Group, and more recently solely Jonathan Burrows, as "precise but very light". It is an individual relationship that develops as appropriate for that time and there is a need for the structure to fit the current needs – i.e. Jonathan Burrows no longer needed the limited company, charitable and VAT status now he was operating as an independent artist instead of as a company.

NH acknowledged the concept of “spinning plates” as a challenge in managing a large organisation such as The Place, striking an appropriate balance between planning securely for tomorrow and investing in creative risk today: “what do we spend today and what do we save for tomorrow?”

### **Hofesh Schechter**

HS could be considered as taking a self-managed approach, steering himself and working with producers and consultants for support and direction where appropriate. HS explained that he had started with how to create work, then how to present work – to as many people as possible and as fast as possible. There were no rules, he just took opportunities as they presented themselves. HS spoke of it not being exactly ‘a company’ but “just a thing that happens”.

There was an element of isolation, particularly during the early stages of developing work: HS spoke of being “alone in a room” sending out videos and looking for opportunities solely by himself. HS acknowledged an element of luck – John Ashford seeing HS’s work and a relationship with The Place developing. In order to concentrate on making the work, more support was needed as offers and enquiries increased. Work with June Gamble through Artist Development at The Place (meeting 4 times a year) had led to “homework” to move things forward, helping HS to focus activity and invest energy in the right places. June’s advocacy for HS wherever she went had been invaluable, although not part of her official role.

### **Gwen Van Spijk**

GVS established CUE in 2001 with partner Austin Lawler (Director and Production Manager) to offer clients the “whole package” of management services. CUE undertakes four strands of work: the “core portfolio” which comprises 5 artist/companies whose work CUE produces and manages and with whom there is an ongoing relationship; projects and services; professional development (sometimes subsidising other strands of work); and acting as an agent. CUE currently has 15 artists with whom it is currently connected and working with, with the manager/artist relationship different in each case. Curating the portfolio is important in terms of having to believe in the work in order to successfully manage and promote it. In light of acting as a producer i.e. investing in the work of the core portfolio, GVS recognised that there is an element of risk. Currently it is difficult to plan work anymore than three or four months in advance.

TT summarised some key issues in all of the panel’s summaries of their work as: element of luck/being opportunistic; finding the right “fit” – the selection of the partner; there are no set patterns – where they exist they need to be revisited to remain relevant and successful.

### **Selection of clients/believing in the work**

There was continued discussion and questions from the floor about the extent to which a manager must feel passionate for and believe in the work they are representing. FC highlighted that the manager has to speak for and sell the artist. The old information-pack-and-video no longer really works – it has to rely on a spirit coming from the person speaking on behalf of the artist. Therefore, belief in the work was essential.

It was recognised that such selectivity of clients was not always feasible, and nearly all managers present admitted to having taken on client work for purely monetary reasons at some point in their career. FC raised concern that creativity and growth are lost when the art starts to support the agency, manager or company, rather than the other way around.

### **“Interference”**

The discussion moved to the idea of managers “interfering” and influencing the artistic product itself. The panel felt there was a need to look at the product together and rework where necessary. Often an artist may be aware of issues with the work but a manager can help in terms of prompting necessary changes. It was agreed that one can hardly be passionate about or committed to work, if one is considered unfit to have a constructive opinion or be heeded! Such denial implies a very different relationship.

### **Commercial v.s Subsidised**

There was discussion of the more commercial aspect of the dance industry and a possible conflict between the commercial and more contemporary worlds. TT cited artists such as Javier de Frutos, Wayne MacGregor and Aletta Collins as straddling both worlds successfully. There were questions from the floor concerning agent models in the commercial sector and the idea of exclusivity for dancers and choreographers. FC spoke to AKC’s venture into the more commercial world, particularly of AK’s work with Kylie, where work is commissioned to very much clearer briefs, shorter creation times and clearly-defined objectives. FC felt that we should not make too much distinction between the two areas. The aim of the manager looking after the artist’s interests is the same in both.

### **Future Dance Managers**

Members of the floor questioned if there is a new generation of Arts Managers developing and if there is a place for new dance managers? The issue of supply – demand was acknowledged. An emerging choreographer working with an experienced manager is not necessarily the correct or the only fit – working with a developing manager might be a better match and allows the two to develop together. The key aspect was the right relationship and enthusiasm about the work, not experience alone and the idea of relationship was equally important to emerging managers as those more experienced. TT referred to the Independance agency and similar models, but pointed out the challenges of maintaining their sustainability, without sustained and consistent funding.

Where do managers come from? There is no set pattern, even amongst the experienced managers. Some more experienced managers present acknowledged that they would love to have a younger manager to work alongside and to help develop but that there was an inherent issue of funding this. Working with a consultant or mentor such as June Gamble was recognised as a way of helping younger managers to develop, much as for emerging choreographers. A ‘traineeship’ with an agency is not the only route.