

RUNNING FIRSTLY WITH DANCING, THEN SITTING, THEN TALKING

Deanne Butterworth

A platform for work in progress, *First Run* has been operating for about a year now. Originally an initiative of Fulbright Postgraduate Scholar, Abigail Sebaly, *First Run* is now co-ordinated and facilitated by dancers and choreographers, Luke George and Brooke Stamp. This bi-monthly event happens on a Monday night with the support of Lucy Guerin Inc.

The general format for the night is that there are three to four works shown- mostly offerings from people working in contemporary dance who want to share a new approach in their practice or present a rough and raw idea in the early stages of development. Following a small pause the participants, with wine glass in hand chat about what has happened.

Having been a *First Run* participant a few times, as a person showing work and as an audience member I have experienced it as an evening where it has been driven by a nominated facilitator, and as a more autonomous event. Neither is necessarily better than the other, but it has been interesting to witness it shift over time and notice that there is a certain level of comfort now in giving good and bad criticism.

What strikes me the most about *First Run* is the difference between a performance and a showing. Where is the line here? When does it change from the showing of a work in progress and become a performance? This is an obvious question, but what happens on these evenings once the post showing discussion very quickly develops from the 'oh yeah I liked that that', or the thought of, 'shit I hated that , what will I say?' and then into something more analytical, is firstly about witnessing a 'performance' and then about discussing choreographic choices and structure.

So, is *First Run* fundamentally a performance event presented as a safe place for showing raw ideas? Most people who attend are performers, or create dance work, or go to dance classes, see performance, or are friends of those showing work so they have an idea about performance, or their notion of it. So it becomes really difficult to separate their process (and included in the process is the showing of work in the rough and raw) from the perceived performance outcome that everybody secretly desires- after all, isn't this why we do it? Really?

This is not new and nor it does not claim to be. *First Run* fills a gap (or creates a space), through offering time to interested artists to show and talk about work and receive criticism from those who witness it. It has the generous support of Lucy Guerin Inc (as it takes place at the studio) and it feels like a very special place for observation and discussion existing in a world connected and conversely disconnected to organisational structure.

Going to *First Run* is a completely supportive experience- movement in space and time in a lovely symmetrical studio close to the city. Lots of things have happened on these Monday evenings since the inception of *First Run*: Standing in silence, asking the audience to turn away from what they have come to see, showing emotion, asking about the definition of the end point, admissions of 'I only made it an hour ago I don't know what it is', showing the bits that make up the complete picture or the incomplete picture, turning off the lights, turning them back on too soon, telling a story, moving slowly, attempting to be still, whipping oneself, admitting that we feel comfortable with adult themes and nudity, singing about love, amplification of the space around the moving

body, being clear about what you want to do, improvising, attempting to piss in the mouth, shocking, not wanting to shock, filming the audience, being mundane, creating a non structure, talking and talking, etc.

Actually the first thing that happens (since Luke and Brooke have been at the helm) has been a group activity. Start to understand the current space and time with your own body. The primary instrument you will see being used here tonight is THE BODY so you may as well start using yours right here right now, right? Sometimes we sit in a circle, we watch, mimic, move, see others in the room and notice who they are, observing their clothing, thinking about what job they might have just come from, or wondering who they know here. Maybe think we know them and what they might do, their likes and dislikes or what they might say later on. Movement is transferred from one body to the next and we watch this sequencing of movement and observe what has been left behind and which instructions have been misunderstood. Maybe we start to judge and separate the good from the bad. This all happens before we get serious about the structure of the 'real work'.

In *First Run World* we usually know the history of each person who shows work, who they have worked with and where they studied. Does it become a little about our knowledge of their dancing history and the wonder and anticipation of what they do next and the constant comparisons of this work to the previous and it's similarity to blah blah.

Usually there is someone who has more to say than the next person, and then there is someone who says nothing at all and only thinks about what they have seen without allowing others to know what they thought. And then, there is the person who keeps quiet and right at the end they say, 'oh my god I was completely shocked in that moment- you could have done anything to me I was totally scared and frightened and I did not know what would happen next'. Are we all too cool to not speak from a physical response?

Was the guy who attempted to piss in his mouth later going to shit on the floor when he got down on all fours? Was the dancer preceding him going to walk closely towards us and not smile. Was she going to stop and look at us and show us more of herself than we had ever seen before? Was the first dancer going to let us in on the joke that she was smiling about as she danced? Oh wait, it was not a joke but something far more serious and worrying- an internality that only she could resolve but why were we watching this? What was it that everyone expected? The anticipation for newness was the drawcard.

So where does it lead? We are all invited to gain a supremely invaluable insight into choreographic processes during the first run of something. We are permitted to ask questions about process and structure and through this we become aware of what it is that we like watching and what others like doing. We allow ourselves to challenge our existing personal preferences and begin to understand the way someone else watches and sees something that is not yet a performance.

The next *First Run* happens in November 2009. fristrun@lucyquerin.com