World of movement

Samantha Whitaker on one of the highlights of the London 2012 Festival

When German choreographer Pina Bausch was asked to create a dance for London to mark the 2012 Games, she refused. "Pina said that London was too fragmented, too much a multiple-personality city," recalls Michael Morris, Director of Cultural Industry, who worked with Bausch for more than 20 years.

Instead, an idea was born to bring to London 10 existing co-productions by Bausch's company, Tanztheater Wuppertal, each based on a different global city. "The Cultural Olympiad presented the perfect opportunity, as the collaborative spirit of Bausch's work counterpoints the competition between nations that exists in the Games," explains Morris.

Bausch died suddenly in 2009, just five days after being diagnosed with cancer. But by then work on 'World Cities 2012' was well under way. The series will run for six weeks during the London 2012 Festival, the culmination of a four-year Cultural Olympiad designed to inspire and celebrate creativity across all forms of culture. For Festival Director, Ruth Mackenzie, "Bausch's great work is unforgettable and will be a highlight of the festival." Such an ambitious staging, involving 75 dancers, was only made possible through funding from the Cultural Olympiad.

Bausch was appointed choreographer at Wuppertal in 1973 and quickly began to make her unique mark on the dancing world. "There is an atmosphere of questioning, but it's very playful. People tend to see her work as bleak, but there is always a lot of laughter. She had a tremendous sense of humour," recalls Morris.

"There are moments of joy, despair, hope, loss and terror. Then everything from the rehearsal is distilled and presented on stage." The result is *tanztheater* ('dance theatre'), a much-imitated fusion of dance and drama, with elaborate set designs, costumes and props, where the dancers mime, laugh and cry, and speak aloud self-penned monologues.

In 1986, the first global collaboration, 'Viktor', was commissioned for Rome. Other cities followed suit, and over the next 23 years the group travelled around the world, from India to Brazil, Hong Kong to Los Angeles. "As guests of the local commissioner of the piece, the company were able to soak up the atmosphere and were shown unusual things that they might not otherwise have seen," says Alistair Spalding, Chief Executive and Artistic Director of Sadler's Wells, which is co-hosting 'World Cities 2012'.

When the dancers returned home after each trip, Bausch asked them to perform what they had discovered. She once said she was "not interested in how people move, but in what moves them". The result of the collaborative improvisations was a series of choreographic travelogues, each one deeply informed by its host location. "In the case of 'Palermo, Palermo' (1989), for example, the dishevelled city, with buildings falling down in disrepair, is recreated literally with the dancers picking their way over rubble on stage," says Spalding.

The intricate and complex stage designs, by Bausch's longstanding collaborator Peter Pabst, meant that it would be impossible to present the whole series in just one theatre, as each project takes several days to set up. The works will therefore be split between Sadler's Wells and the Barbican, an unprecedented collaboration between two usually competing dance venues.

Dominique Mercy and Robert Sturm, the new Directors of Tanztheater Wuppertal, have said that being part of London 2012 is "an amazing and outstanding homage to Pina Bausch and a great honour". Spalding is only sorry Bausch herself couldn't be there. "For her, it would have been a break; the company are rarely in the same place for more than two weeks."

Samantha Whitaker is a Sub-Editor at Sunday Publishing and a former Deputy Editor of Overseas.

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Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch: 'World Cities 2012', 6 June - 9 July. Sadler's Wells, +44 (0)844 412 430; www.sadlerswells.com. The Barbican, +44 (0)845 120 7550; www.barbican.org.uk.



LEAP OF FAITH: The Kolkata-inspired 'Bamboo Blues', one of 10 works in the 'World Cities 2012' series

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