

Including everyone

The following lecture focuses on particular examples of practices in creative work with audiences and communities in Norway.

The company was established in 1997 by me as the choreographer, dancer, and producer and by the theater film/director and playwright Marcelino Martin Valiente. Its first creative expressions were dance theater and contemporary dance. Six years later, in 2004, we included other art disciplines: theater, video, architecture, and concerts.



A Performance in the Ekebergsletta Park (Oslo)

Since I can remember, art venues in Norway have not been very open to dance, there were only three venues focused on classical ballet and contemporary dance plus one venue for folk dance. During the past fifteen years, some institutions have accepted contemporary dance productions into their programming. During the past seven years, five new venues for rehearsing contemporary dance have appeared. Company B. Valiente's experience comes from the times when there were really few venues for contemporary dance and theater.

Therefore in 2000, 22 years ago, we were one of the very few companies in Norway to show performances in unusual "venues" like prisons, galleries, military camps, religious communities, schools, alongside public spaces.



A Performance in the *DOGA* Design and Architecture Center (Oslo)



A Performance in the *DOGA* Design and Architecture Center (Oslo)

Why this new trend – creative work with audience – started in Norway?

There are many reasons. I personally believe that the main reasons for looking for new stages outside the traditional theaters were the lack of suitable venues and the lack of money for contemporary artists. In addition, during the past twenty years, the Ministry of Culture of Norway has focused on helping ONLY some NGO contemporary dance and theater companies. The Ministry of Culture supported a few companies with generous funds during the period of the 12-16 consecutive years. That resulted in a few particular companies getting a higher chance to be included in the program of the venues, thanks to their economic stability and better remuneration for their artists and the administration.

This situation has forced the majority of artists to look for alternative ways to produce their art. At that time, municipalities wanted professional performances to include also activities focused on the locals.



A Performance in the *RING – Scène périphérique* Theater Atelier/Residential Rehearsal Space (Toulouse)

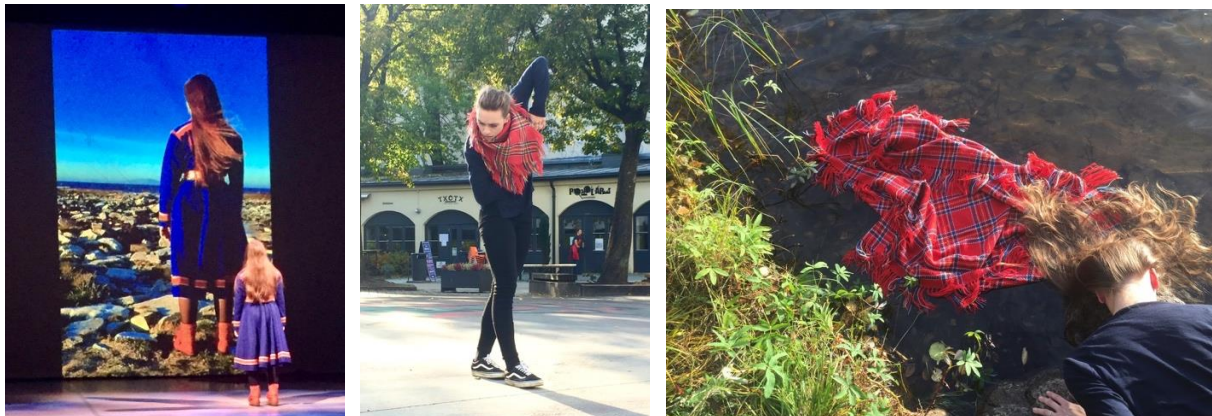


A Performance in the *RING – Scène périphérique* Theater Atelier/Residential Rehearsal Space (Toulouse)

That is why the artists started to work with audiences in new ways. All the factors mentioned above resulted in the need for a more open attitude towards including everyone. Now we can watch performances including the locals, people of all age categories, from young to the elderly as well as groups like the indigenous people, people with different levels of variability in their physical functions, people of different gender, etc.

Concerning the gender problem, the Norwegian government offers extra economic support for transsexual choreographers and dancers to help them create their

performances and tour with them. Homosexual artists have been accepted, included, and supported for over twenty or even thirty years.



A Performance with the Indigenous People of Sami (Norway), a Folk Dance Venue and Outdoors

During the past years, many organizations and festivals with a focus on diversity in their particular ways have worked or have been held in Norway. That is where we can observe new trends in the creative approach to the audience.

DansiT

DansiT is an organization focusing on dance. It is a choreographic center located 500 km north of Oslo. DansiT (which refers to dance within the city of Trondheim), offers activities for both professional dancers and a wide audience. There are creative residencies and the center also co-produces some performances. In addition, DansiT has been creating various activities to create a connection between the artists and the audience. The center wishes everyone to have access to dance and choreography. One example of such activity is the creation of a dance group formed by women aged up to the age of ninety. Led by the artistic director Arnhild Staal Pettersen, the dance group focuses on working with elderly people through improvisation, choreography, and experimental dance encounters.

Another example is **Dance Laboratory**, focusing on experimenting, exploring, and creating contemporary dance by uniting professionals and amateur dancers with variability in physical functions. The Laboratory's work evolves around improvisation, contact improvisation, partner work, choreography, and discussing dance and movement, led by the artistic director Ingeborg Dugstad Sanders.

Theater Manu

This theater, located in Oslo, was established fifteen years ago, and it is the only state-sponsored theater that **does performances in sign language**. The theater's new director Janne Langaas will expand the theater's activities in 2022 by promoting more the artists who play in sign language. She is also starting a youth company and she

supports young people in applying for getting professional experience in artistic, technical and administrative functions within the theater's structure.

More examples for “including everyone” by the festival CODA

CODA (contemporary dance) is the largest Nordic contemporary dance festival (also called CODA - Oslo International Dance Festival), organized by its new artistic director Stine Nilsen.

She says: “A new generation of dance artists show that there has been a big change in the general atmosphere, concerning a stronger generosity and stronger wishes for collaboration.”

In collaboration with the festival's team, she initiated a mentor program called 'Diverse Nordic Voices Choreographic Initiative' – aimed at enhancing a greater diversity of choreographic development within the Nordic region. This initiative is aimed at **'disabled' artists and artists dealing with norm criticism** coming from Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Norm criticism is just one of the festival's many concerns; changing the word 'disabled' to 'a variation in physical functions' is another.

Community work in Norway

Several choreographers work with **the community within the realm of dance**, like Karen Høybakk Mikalsen and Alicja Ziolkó, among others. They prepare 'Community Dance', a **dance practice** during which professional dancers engage various **communities** in creating dance performances. No dance skills are needed. The practices bring in groups formed by the locals to make performances and improvisations in no-stage venues, such as libraries, train stations, households or even outdoors, for example, on the beach, etc.

My work for COMPANY B. VALIENTE during the Covid time, where I directed a performance for art students.

There are three theater and dance schools in the Oslo district where I live. There is also a great diversity of people with different origins living there. During the Covid time last summer, the administration board of the district offered various employers monthly pay for youngsters and students to help those social groups get jobs. It had helped the young people to work because the Covid restrictions had a negative impact on different types of businesses, companies, coffee houses/restaurants, stores, etc. Nearly all were shut down, which resulted in few job opportunities for young people.



The Students Shortly Before the Premiere



A Rehearsal with the Students in the K1 Studio (Oslo) and A Rehearsal in the Performing Location, Tøyen park (Oslo)

I observed that during the Covid times, the BA dance students were not provided with full-fledged education. The students had very few public performances, worked with only a few guest choreographers, and they trained in their sleeping rooms for only a short amount of time while following their teachers on Zoom. Therefore, I took the initiative to contact the administration of my district to offer myself as an employer for several art students. I was provided with funds for eight salaries for the students from these theater schools and I employed eight students with different origins, like Kenya, France, China, Canada, Vietnam and Norway.

We shared our experiences with the Covid pandemic and worked and created both indoors and outdoors. The 'stillness', the loneliness, the lack of opportunities for self-realization, the presence of climate change and the news about hundreds and thousands who died or were seriously ill were some of the themes we shared. I invited the students to express these thoughts through music, writing, speaking, dancing performed outdoors in a park on several occasions. The audience sat in the grass watching the performance while clouds were floating with the wind to let the sunbeams appear and disappear again.

My future project «RE-CONNECT, Past and Present» with a strong focus on creative work with the audience

With Company B. Valiente, we plan to create a blend of contemporary performing arts and our inspirations and scenes from Dovre's cultural heritage and history. This creation will be a moving dance and music performance set in a specific place in the Norwegian Dovre mountains and its farms. With this project, I will try to reach awareness of both the past and the present!



Performing Space Project “Re-connect, Past and Present” (Søndre Bjørnsgaard/Dovre)



Performing Space Project “Re-connect, Past and Present” (Søndre Bjørnsgaard/Dovre)

I find it important to witness cultural heritage first-hand. I believe that not getting to know it on a personal level results in a distanced relationship with it. That way, you don't get any particular understanding of where you come from, and such understanding is a part of the meaning of *heritage*! The joy of setting out on an excursion, and being in an environment filled with stories, enables you to gain a new perspective on time and be part of “the past and the present”.



Performing Space Project “Re-connect, Past and Present” (Angard/Dovre)

One of the farms in Bergsgrenda, named Søndre Bjørnsgaard, has belonged to my family since the 16th century, if not more. I have been spending my holidays at this place all my life, and I know its roots.

I see my artistic work and research as an elastic ‘timeline’, getting stretched and relaxed while looking for a balance between historical facts and objects from far back in time, and my own abstract, contemporary, non-verbal expression set in today. It will be a moving site-specific performance connecting six farms in Bergsgrenda, where the site's unique natural resources and geology also will serve as an extra dimension of this particular piece of art.

This is an artistic work where a variety of professional performing artists from Norway with different origins and also coming from the Norway’s indigenous people, the Sami, will participate. The performance will also include the locals as amateur artists and figurants. Young people are invited, like a local dance group but also elderly singers from a seniors’ choir. Also the elderly men and women who live in the farms are involved as amateur artists. During the weekends, the performance will be held for the open public and during the weekdays, schools will be invited to attend. For the verification of the historical facts, I am inviting historians and folk song specialist from Dovre.

Some of the 17 UN sustainability goals are followed in the Dovre region, which gives a particular sense for this kind of project. Since there are no jobs to find in this mountain village, most young people leave Dovre after finishing the high school. However, the place carries a huge cultural heritage and it can not be moved anywhere, which is what I strive for to focus on. It is my goal to convey a performing

arts piece to school students, to the locals and even to the tourists and to increase historical awareness. Like the 17 UN sustainability goals say, art and culture can help create an inclusive and life-long learning sensation about the places of our origins. I believe that by protecting cultural and natural heritage, we can discover new innovative ideas on how to re-settle in Dovre, ending up achieving a sustainable economic growth.



Performing Space Project “Re-connect, Past and Present” (Søndre Bjørnsgaard/Dovre)

Left to right: Choreographer/Director Gunhild Bjørnsgaard
Theater / Film director, playwright Marcelino Martin Valiente

We hope that with “Re-connect, past and present”, we can inspire and enhance the connection between contemporary performing art disciplines and the inspirations and situations from rooted in cultural heritage and history.