

Yvonne Meier

with Rebecca Serrell

R: First question, a little off the beaten track...can you tell me about the first dance you ever made?

Y: I remember when I was playing that really stupid Cossack music from the 60's. This was a really big deal in Europe and the song was a huge pop hit in Germany. I made a fake Russian dance. Whatever I imagined was "Russian" was put in there. That's the first dance I ever made with my friend.

R: How old were you?

Y: I think I was 12. She got all the credit for it.

R: What is the biggest difference between how you were thinking about that piece then and how you think about your work now?

Y: Back then I took it very serious, I was very sincere, especially making a Russian dance in Switzerland. The biggest difference now is that I do not want to be politically correct and I'm sick of being nice. There is what is commonly good, right, and then there is what is commonly wrong. I'm using incorrect things, really showing them off, and putting a question mark behind it in order to ask, "Is this REALLY wrong?" For example, I will use my dancers as very extreme stereotypes, amplifying to the max who they are and what they can do, and I don't expect them to feel good about it. It becomes double edged.

R: So you are laughing, ridiculing?

Y: I have an urge to produce some fashion of comedy in a good way, and I'm certainly not being mean. A lot of the time I laugh at the pretentious serious stuff; the stuff that is so out of time; the stuff that is so over. People aren't aware of how silly they look and the older and older you get, the more things you have seen and at some point you just have to laugh. It must be the age.

R: Do you think the dancers, uh...performers you are working with have this same approach as well?

Y: Similar.

Y: The three dancers I have in this is not a pink pony... Marion was a Releasing student of mine and I liked how she was very serious about it; Arturo was also a student of mine,

young and totally ready to go; and Osmani was in a piece before with me. I was interested because they were pretty young and because my work now is not made off of my body, my movement, but rather theirs. In the studio I start with an initial idea, some innocent improvisation, some specific tasks. Then I step back, see what is coming out, and amplify by asking them to do what they do MORE, as opposed to asking them to go this way or that. Also we are doing jump-roping and Osmani can do all sorts of gymnastic things with that.

R: Yup, he has an amazing physicality...speaking of physicality, I saw the picture on the card with the ape riding the bull.

Y: It's the MONKEY riding the COW!

R: Where's the monkey come from?

Y: The monkey comes from Switzerland. Actually the monkey costume gets flown in by the balloons, my friend gets the costume, and she turns slowly into a mountain monkey.

R: How do you find these props, like, what connects you to them?

Y: The image of the balloons I've worked with before. I used to make these pieces, the balloons would be attached to the clothes and they would fly away. This time not only do the clothes fly away, but the balloons carry back the monkey suit. I think it's mostly a visual concern and it was for a project outside at Lincoln Center where I thought it would be great to have something fly away, way up into the sky.

R: And how much do you plan ahead with these kinds of visual images as opposed to just intuitively wanting something to be there?

Y: Uh, it's both. My mind produces all these images and I'm really involved with the objects so I always look around for objects to dance/do-things with. The foam rolls for example that I dance with in Mad Heidi...we just found some foam rolls somewhere in the rehearsal space at PS 1, we were making this crazy piece, and we would just like collapse on them. I went to France and I saw these gigantic hay bales and thought it'd be so nice to roll around on them but they are made of hay! You can't roll around on hay! So I combined the foam rolls with hay rolls from France. I'm not sure why I got into the monkey thing. The only thing I remember is I really wanted gorillas to jump rope and dance at the same time as a physical task.

R: Gogolorez is an ongoing piece, isn't it?

Y: It's an improvisation group. We started two years ago at the Movement Research improv festival. OOOH! We thought 'Let's just do something for the benefit night,' and, right, I didn't want to dance. So I merged my improv mind with their improv skills and basically found myself dancing in my head, inventing scores. We don't rehearse the scores. It's REALLY a surprise.

R: Is it a total improvisation for you, the language aspect?

Y: No. No, I know what I'm gonna say to a degree. I write down the ideas. I, like, meditate on the ideas. It's all a big picture. Then I sort of try to work on it so it can be done well and in the moment. What I am gonna tell them has to be so clear and so specific that's its possible to make those choices right then and there. I teach Releasing and in that words are very, very important. Every word has a totally different meaning or different shade. I used to go home and write exactly what I would say, but practice has helped, and now I can be more open. In Gogolorez I have ideas that I know I have to choose from and then it's always, options, depending on what happens, that I go this way or that way.

R: Your sense of verbal timing is amazing. You give the dancers enough time to get into what they are doing, or not. It's a total conversation even though...

Y: And the people do whatever they want to, I have noticed. (hee hee)

R: Do you practice very frequently?

Y: We have been practicing but we, like, we are, well, nice to each other. We are doing lovely bodywork and everybody's cuddling with everyone else. This is the preparation. A little hippy union.

R: You've gotta get the ringmaster/boss thing out of rehearsal time in order to get them to...

Y: Everybody gets pampered.

R: What do you think about the desire of the performers to do EVERYTHING you say?

Y: Well, I'm not sure how much they do have the desire. They appreciate the madness of the images. I think it's entertaining to them and probably quite scary cause a lot of times I sort of expose all kinds of layers, telling them to do things they would never want to do. Like going into the non-permission scores, for example, which can get to be a bit obscene or perverse both culturally and personally to the dancer.

R: Non-permission?! Hmmm...Any wild secret directions?

Y: I'm brewing them up. I'm trying to find which ones I should back off of. Some of the dancers I don't know so well, so I'm not sure what's gonna happen with that.

R: I was having this argument with someone the other day. We were having an argument about Pink Pony Judson excerpt. He said it was a "performance", not a "piece", because it wasn't set.

Y: Who cares?

R: Well, if there's all this set work, and all this open performance, can't I compare them?

Y: Yeeeh. These days they are so intertwined. You don't really know which it is. Thank god. Who cares?

R: How come you don't set movement anyways?

Y: I've spent years going back and forth and at some point definitely found for myself that movement is more interesting when it's not set. Whatever comes out of me, I can do better when I don't set. I'll make scores and be much more creative. All the little shifts of weight, this or that, you can't repeat it. When you repeat something it's supposed to look like the first time you are doing it, but it never is, so you are like lying. Lying. That I find so annoying. Sometimes I do set movement and mix things around, but as soon as I start to set, I notice things are getting much more simple. You can make it complex again but that is just such a painful process to tackle. Some choreographers are really good at that, but it's not for me. I think it's the notion that if you put a lot of work into something, it's gonna be better. In Switzerland they say, we can't get you anything because you are improvising meaning you haven't thought about it or put any work into it. When I talk to producers I never say I am improvising. I would never talk about it. "Uh-uh, can I buy that jump? If I can't buy the jump I can't buy the show."

R: That's worth ridiculing in and of itself, that weird innate hierarchy. I think that's why Gogolorez is so hilarious. You are the dictator authority figure with words, giving orders, but you are showing the dance in a format against that. The dancers have so much freedom.

Y: Yes, I tried it without the words. The audience didn't know what the dancers were going to do and that didn't seem to work so well, but as soon as they knew what the dancers were supposed to do, it became more framed. There is a clear explanation of what's happening and you can really see what they will do with the idea.

R: Yeah, the audience can better understand the choreographic and improvisation choices, which are generally never grammatically sensible. How does it make sense for you? How do you refine the choreography in this evening of dance?

Y: I go home and think about my own needs, what I want to see. It's a constant back and forth between my choices and the dancer's. The shape of the piece is a BIG factor and I juggle what will be interesting after what. Lately I've bombarded the dancers with crazy arrangements of pink pony. I don't want the obvious. I want surprise, kinesthetic suspense, and a very considered rhythm and musicality.

R: That's a "piece" with a lot of preparation.

R: What is a pink pony?

Y: You don't know? It's a restaurant downtown.

R: Great, what's for dinner? Pink Pony Burgers that don't exist?

Y: It really is a restaurant. OK. It's a few images I can't really talk about right now, but it's a bit related to the cow. There is this man in Switzerland who has trained a cow. He picked the nicest one he had and started to train it. With croissants. It would eat the croissant crusts!

R: She's a cow, not a bull, like jumping around and kicking up?!

Y: Well, she's not really kicking. He rides her and she sort of gallops around in the space and she leaps over objects. Her name is Cybil. You can take her anywhere; she sits; she rolls on the ground.

R: And she takes crazy monkeys for rides around town.

Y: Her trainer was wearing this monkey mask and she didn't mind. I think it was the voice. He would always talk to her. With his voice.

R: So then, we'll let Cybil and the pink pony hang out, keeping secrets.