

In Conversation with Jasmin Vardimon, July 2007

By Mairead Turner

Over the last ten years I have been watching Jasmin's works grow from their beginnings as intense duets and trios to their present incarnations as large ensemble works, the latest production being *Justitia* - located in and around a courtroom.

Jasmin started the process of making *Justitia* by exploring the specific location of the courtroom and the idea of different realities and how to present them to an objective jury. The courtroom is an apt representation and reflection of the dominant attitudes, beliefs and rules of a given time. A courtroom is a location like Jasmin's previous settings of a hospital and a park that form the grand civic, public spaces where our private lives and ambitions are played out and where we can be caught at our most emotional and vulnerable.

It is from these specific locales that Jasmin begins her creative process, working through the concepts and developing the images of the sets to be built. Then comes the long working process with the dancers, starting with a research period where Jasmin pushes the boundaries of the dancers. Experience has taught her that dancers often rely on what they have done before or feel secure and successful with. Jasmin tries to break the dancers known responses, learnt ways and mannerisms and studies their other qualities that they may never have explored before. Of this process she says "for the dancers it feels as though we throw a lot away but for me it's a way to map ideas, and I learn about the dancers. I'm looking for dancers that I feel are able to explore their versatility, that can open up, take risks, trust me, go through the process and adapt quickly"

Once the characters have developed she starts to develop the script in parallel with the scriptwriter. Jasmin has gradually introduced text into her works over the years, and *Justitia* feels much more aligned to a play through her collaboration with scriptwriter Rebecca Lenkewicz. In fact *Justitia* opens with the very process of writing, a courtroom stenographer, click - clicking the opening facts onto a typewriter, which are projected onto the set, taking us sparsely into the heart of the courtroom. The opening also signals the unswerving solidity of words which can be cleanly recorded and recalled in stark contrast to the transitory and unreliable nature of dance which can be something much more ambiguous, fragile and anamorphous.

I asked Jasmin whether she had found so much text limiting, but she had found it liberating, enabling her to include scenes such as the group therapy sessions, which alternate between harrowing, illuminating and scornfully funny vignettes on the human psyche and behaviour. The group therapy illustrates people dealing with their guilt in contrast to the courtroom where they are busy proving their innocence. The therapy sessions also serve to implicate us in our narrowing objectivity as we grow more sympathetic to the psychology of the characters.

The final part of the creative process for Jasmin is layering the music which is highly unusual in the dance-making scene and much more aligned to the film industry. Only when the movement is created does Jasmin work with the sound designer and the score. This approach has developed because she finds music so influential and wants to rely primarily on the concept, entrusting the music to serve as the atmosphere.

Jasmin has an unswerving belief in the arts as a way of communicating ideas and concerns, through the emotional involvement of the audience. She has become less interested in creating images that are merely visually satisfying and more interested in the stories, feeling disappointed that it is seemingly easier for literature or film to emotionally involve people than dance or theatre.

In *Justitia* Jasmin more than ever before, wanted to get closer to the emotional and intellectual information so that the audience can engage on all levels. It is the last section that is without words and with minimal movement that affects me the most in *Justitia*. It is a series of eerie tableaux presented in each of the rooms of the revolving stage, that spins like a surreal carousel. We sit mesmerised and lulled by the slowly moving set, revealing dancers stilled in time, captured like a lived stop frame animation, somehow in the midst of their lives. It feels intrusive and accidental, stumbled upon, yet unbearably sad and beautiful.

Through *Justitia* Jasmin has again succeeded in her ambition to make Dance Theatre deeply affecting.