

"How Movement comes from Feeling- "Dancing To Connect": Dancers from New York work with Students from 5 different Schools

How much confidence does it take, simply to stand, eyes closed, and to examine your inner self? Do you sit or stand, both feet on the floor? Should you let your arms hang by your sides, or is it safer to fold them? In the Auditorium of the Freiburger Pestalozzi-Realschule stood twenty students from the 8th and 9th grade, listening carefully to the voice of Paul Blackman, a dancer from NY: 'Feel your own Body'. Until this point of the "Dancing to Connect" project, it is an enormous achievement, to take a truthful look inside, without an appraisal from outside, to evaluate, to be able to judge, without fear.

Choreographer Jonathan Hollander and the dancer Tadej Brdnik led the "Veteran" students through this probing in Kepler Gymnasium. The students are between 14-19 years old, who took part in the 2006 project "Dancing for the Blue House". There, the dancers from New York's dance groups Battery Dance Company and Drastic Action, who are once again guests in Freiburg, developed and choreographed a dance for the Jewish Memorial in Briesach with students from various Freiburg Schools.

Two pieces of tape
On the Chest

The project stirred up so much enthusiasm, that the Carl Schurz House, the Kepler Gymnasium, the American Embassy, the Padagogische Hochschul, the Freiburg Theatre and several sponsors joined forces in the continuing effort to work together again, only changing the theme. As it is, "Dancing to Connect" is composed of workshops for 120 students in Freiburg. "The support that we get from all sides" said Alfred Rogoll, who pulls the strings with all of the organizations, "is overwhelming."

The "Veterans" wore to pieces of tape on their chests. On one was their name, on the other a trait. They should complete the sentence, "If you are my best friend, you should know that I..." A boy wrote that he was unsure of himself. "Uncertain" is readable on his shirt. From such openness comes the confidence to take the first step. "If you want to dance, you must open yourself up," said Hollander. For the few that confidence begins with the opening after standing with eyes shut, for others the abandonment of singularity. The stronger the trust inside the group, the less courage is needed. Noam, a sixth grader, said, "At first we didn't trust ourselves. But now it doesn't matter. We simply do it."

The Students prepare themselves at five different schools- Emil-Goett School, Staudinger Gesamtschule, Pestalozzi-Real Schule, Berthold and Kepler Gymnasium- for their combined performance on the Freiburger Theatre stage. A few classmates come with video camera. Others have put together a homepage (www.dancingtoconnect.de) with news, photos, and film clips. The overall group theme is understanding across cultures- Dancing, in order to achieve a Connection. "It begins with a connection with yourself," said the English teacher Wolfgang Borchardt, who was responsible for the project. The common language is English. Higher still is a connection in body language, the vocabulary of ones movement, which the others must learn to read. Because there is no right or wrong.

In Noams Group, with the "Youngsters" between 12 and 15 years of age, everyone wrote out their personal story. From the stories comes a certain feeling, sadness for example. From the sadness develops a movement, a gesture. It requires others to take part. A small group of five students lay on the floor. Two sit up, position their one arm over their knee, and bury their face in the elbow of the other. This, from now on, is the gesture of sadness. The other students follow their lead. A cycle develops, in which the self found gestures and poses of the young dancers fuse their movements together. Now its time to choose the Music, to find a common rhythm, and to be aware of the smallest gestures.

The international dance teacher considers, encourages, and clarifies. Her authority shows in the togetherness business. It's a mixture of discipline, serenity, and humor, all of which she exudes. A cool, spirited be said, "'Cuz it's fun, I'll show you right now the whole thing." At the Emil-Goett-Schule, Beatrix Boestel, who has been a teacher at the school for 35 years, attends the workshop. On the first day the students were tired after three hours. Slowly, they wanted to come earlier every day and stay longer. Such an enthusiasm, Boestel said she'd never seen before in all her years of teaching.

In a few days they will stand on the stage: the boys and the girls, the 12 and 19 year olds, the Hauptschueler and the Gymnasien (The High School-ers and the trade school-ers?), students and dancers from all different countries. And none of them will leave the stage, without at least one feeling of how it is to take responsibility on themselves.

---Excursion on 17 July at 7:30 in the Big House of the Freiburg Theatre.