2017 - 2018
FINNISH DANCE IN FOCUS
EDITORIAL

CAN WE TACKLE SOCIETY’S PROBLEMS THROUGH DANCE?

In today’s global climate, many feel that we live in a precarious and unsafe world, and this is also reflected in dance art. Art and artists are taking the opportunity to speak out in defence of empathy, trust, honesty and love. Collaboration is the working method du jour, and individual artistic geniuses and stars have been replaced by work that embraces collective creation between artists from different spheres.

Body language and dance can be more effective than mere words when it comes to initiating all-encompassing human encounters. Breakdance workshops are being used to prevent and resolve bullying problems involving young people, and a dance video made by a church in Helsinki and published on YouTube touched many with its comforting message.

Joint performances by a Finnish dance artist and an Iranian musician who applied for asylum in Finland are leaving many in tears, and audience discussions on the topic of immigration have become an integral part of the piece.

Many artists are now taking a more forthright approach to seizing upon topical issues. In recent years Finland has seen the creation of a number of dance works based around themes that clearly delve into issues such as environmental problems, sustainable development, violence and racialisation. However, the political aspects of art are not restricted to topics expressed verbally; how people are portrayed or the context in which a work is performed also constitute political content.

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Dance not only inspires us, it is also doing its part to tackle society’s problems.

Sanna Kangasluoma
Editor

DANCE Info Finland acts as a gateway to Finnish dance art through international networks and by providing information about dance in Finland. Our mission is to support the development of Finnish dance art, and to open new horizons and create professional opportunities and connections for Finnish dance artists. We are partners in collaboration projects and exchange programmes, and work closely with the Nordic dance sector and platforms. Founded in 1980, we are funded mainly by the Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland. Read more on www.danceinfo.fi.
IN JUST OVER half a year the Dancing Finland campaign had already reached 1.5 million people. Ordinary people in schools, organisations and working communities — and even Finland’s official Santa Claus — have taken part in the Dance Challenge. The dance videos created by City of Helsinki and Malmi Parish have brought together employees and touched audiences.

“We published our video late on a Sunday evening. That evening there were plenty of people by themselves, surfing the internet, who contacted me to tell me about their life situation, and how our dance had brought them a few moments of hope and comfort”, states Malmi’s rector Heikki Arikka.

A total of 27 employees from Malmi Parish worked together with Glims & Gloms Dance Theatre to produce their own dance video based on the campaign’s contemporary dance choreography by choreographer Panu Varstala.

According to the rector, getting involved in the dance increased self-esteem and brought joy to both employees and parishioners: ‘The employees involved felt the working community grew closer and the atmosphere improved thanks to the dance moment.’

“THERE ARE NICE FEEDBACKS!”

The City leadership danced the campaign’s ballet choreography created by Marina Tirkkonen in the stunning Empire Hall in Helsinki City Hall. The video spread quickly on social media, with over 80,000 views making it the City Executive Office’s most popular Facebook video ever.

“We got well-deserved attention both internally and externally — and around a dozen cities have since made their own dance videos,” says Senior Advisor Hannu Hyttinen.

“I’m proud of Helsinki,” commented one city resident on social media.

DANCE LEAVES ITS MARK

The Dancing Finland campaign has offered previous non-dancers the opportunity to give dance a try. Some surprising participants have produced their own Dance Challenge videos, and just before Midsummer, Finland’s official Santa Claus took up the challenge on Twitter. Santa and his elves produced their own dance video and tried out street dance for the first time.

Dance has also left its mark on people and communities. Getting involved in dance made Malmi’s rector think about how the Parish communicates:

“In focusing on verbal communication, the other elements of what make us human have clearly been forgotten or fallen to the wayside. I hope that the light of dance and using our bodies become more widespread in parish activities around Finland.”

The Dancing Finland campaign will continue until the end of 2017. And dance will continue long beyond that! The Dancing Finland campaign features choreography created by choreographers in six different dance genres. Anyone can learn the choreography of their choice with the help of a video or teacher. You can participate in the Challenge by photographing or filming your own dance and sharing it on social media — and you can challenge anyone to get involved.

www.dancingfinland.fi
THIRTY YEARS AGO, in 1986, a group of young choreographers striving for a new form of expression founded Zodiak as a production association for freelance dance artists. These pioneers included Kirsii Monni, Sanna Kekkiläinen, Liisa Pentti and Soile Lahdenperä. At that time, dance performances took place in only a handful of dance theatres, and university-level contemporary dance tuition had just started in Helsinki.

Zodiak arrived onto a scene that was dominated by the trio of classical ballet, modern dance and jazz dance. Zodiak’s performances were something completely different: they worked better in the frame of current phenomena, fine art and performance art. The performances produced by Zodiak were pivotal to the development of new Finnish dance in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1997 Zodiak expanded, taking on the name ‘Zodiak – Center for New Dance’ and becoming a common forum that unites the contemporary dance sphere, offering further education and training for professionals and a basis for ground-breaking outreach and international cooperation. It has become a stage, a renowned place where people can see the most interesting performances and trends in contemporary dance.

One of Zodiak’s key operating principles is still its artist-driven orientation. Its programme of domestic premières is based largely on an open application process and curation carried by the artistic director together with the artistic working group.

We asked a few artists for their views on the significance of Zodiak for contemporary dance in Finland and what kind of mark Zodiak has left on them personally.

Liisa Pentti, one of Zodiak’s founding choreographers:

“Zodiak Presents was originally a collective, not an institution, and it had a decisive impact on me as a young dance artist. Together we found a concrete framework to make our work possible. Zodiak also formed a community in which we could forward and develop our own artistic ideas, as the dance field in Finland in the 1980s and 1990s was very different to nowadays.

I was involved in creating Zodiak’s content and practices for many years – 1987–2012 – so a part of me remains within Zodiak. In my current role as artistic director of my own dance group, I feel that my time at Zodiak gave me the capability to lead my own group as well as set up useful practices. I believe that Zodiak will continue to have an important role in the Finnish dance field as a facilitator and developer of contemporary dance.”

Legendary American choreographer Deborah Hay, who performed her solo pieces Music and Oh Beautiful at Zodiak in 2003, and has since visited Finland a number of times as a teacher and choreographer:

“Zodiak was the first experimental dance organization in Europe to present my work. Even more, for the wealth of Helsinki dancers, Zodiak maintained a continuity for study through support of my workshops, performances, and talks.”

Jarkko Partanen, choreographer, member of the Board of Zodiak 2013–2017:

“Zodiak has been an essential place for me – my first piece after graduating was chosen for Zodiak’s programme, and just like that I had launched my professional career. The support, resources and entire creative context, along with the audience relationship, that I gained from working at Zodiak, have proved to be irreplaceable.

Zodiak’s ongoing dialogue with foreign dance artists and producers inspires contemporary dance in Finland, and it has helped me to expand my own networks.”

Heikki Paasonen, lighting designer, recipient of awards such as the Finland Prize in 2012:

“I’ve worked as lighting designer for around 30 Zodiak dance pieces. I see Zodiak as something of a home stage for me, a place where I’ve created the framework for my own development and growth in my profession.

It’s difficult to even imagine how I would be without Zodiak or the people there, with whom I’ve had so many fruitful collaborations! Actually, I should thank Zodiak for the profile I now have in the contemporary dance field.”

Maija Hirvanen, Zodiak house choreographer 2013–2015:

“A space becomes a place the more time you spend there. For me, Zodiak is not just any stage, it is The Place. Zodiak is the place where you can develop new things and be connected with the history it has. It is an umbrella and a temporary home for a growing group of dance artists working on a project basis, without regular funding. A place where you can create and perform your own work, as well as partaking, watching, sweating, discussing. Spending time.

The mark Zodiak has left on me is one of thousands of faces: a huge group of artists, creators, audience members whom I’ve met. Zodiak’s mark reminds me that I’m not alone in this work.

Zodiak’s mark has sympathetic ears, curious eyes, the deep smile of a many-headed creature that has embraced hard work and will continue to do so with no fear.

Zodiak’s mark stretches the entire body.”

TERO SAARINEN: AT THE SOURCES OF PRIMAL FORCE

TWO NEW PIECES by Tero Saarinen will be premiersed in 2018: a commission for the renowned Los Angeles Philharmonic and a duet with accordionist Kimmo Pohjonen. With the LA Phil Saarinen is working on an interpretation of Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s cello concerto En forme de pas de trois (1946). The piece, choreographed for three dancers, will be performed at the 2,265-seater Walt Disney Concert Hall.

“I’m interested in how a performer can be intimate yet resonate up to the very back row at the same time,” Saarinen explains. The commissioned piece involves a union close to Saarinen’s heart, one combining live music and dance and one that he describes as a primal force: “If dance and music become something greater together, I feel that I have succeeded.”

Saarinen is also exploring the sources of primal force with musician Kimmo Pohjonen.

“It’s interesting to bring together your own artistic vision and someone else’s. To see whether you become something more together than you are individually.”

Saarinen describes the pair’s work as unusual: he also experiments with creating sound and Pohjonen explores movement. Morphed (premiered in 2014), a piece for seven male dancers, will continue to be performed throughout 2017–2018 on major stages around the world. The choreographer’s aim is to create art that stands the test of time. “You can return to the works time after time, much like a good book or play.”

KIRSI MONNI: “TEACHING AND RESEARCH ARE INTERTWINED”

TEXT Sara Raekallio PHOTO Kati Naukkarinen

AFTER A BREAK of several years, Kirsi Monni, Professor of Choreography at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki and founding member of Zodiak, has created a new work, Acts and Affects, which premiered at Zodiak – Center for New Dance on April 20, 2017.

The theme of the piece is the mediated mental landscape saturated with structural and everyday violence, both real and fictitious. Violence as a theme has a powerful bodily affect.

The starting point for the work was to use choreography as a means to investigate the bodily experience produced by the flow of media (images) filled with violence. “Violence as a subject cannot be approached directly, it should be viewed a bit from the side, through thinking, poetry and reflection, as the philosopher Slavoj Zizek has said,” Monni comments.

The concept of the piece finds points of connection with both the virtual world and visual art. For example, the simultaneous, texture-like and non-hierarchical use of space have been inspired by the similarity of the net-like structure of internet and perspective-free Renaissance paintings. And the investigation of movement has its motives in the expression of contemporary sculpture, in which the return of the figure achieves power “through pushing, rudeness, ridiculousness, and savagery,” Monni quotes art theorist Lisa Lee.

As an article in issue 4/2017 of Teatteri&Tanssi puts it, “The pictorial choreographic scenes are reminiscent of a ritual, where the sharp boundary between life and death becomes permeable. Crossing that boundary isn’t trivial, as it is in the diluted reality of entertainment violence. Through the ritual, life is given value and death a deeper meaning.”

Kirsi Monni, you’ve concentrated on teaching for the past eight years. How has that influenced the making of this work? “First of all, I think about my activity at the university as an entirety that includes not just teaching but supervising students at the MA and doctorate level, following and doing research, collaboration with other art programs also internationally, publish- ing activities, following the field, and a lot of structural development at the university level. And secondly, for me teaching and research are intertwined, every topic is being thought anew from the current context, together with my students. All of this keeps my work on its toes and awake, provided I experience these activities as not being dissociated from the questions of art, even if I haven’t been creating works of my own.”

“I also supervise the students’ artistic process every year, from small demo pieces to large collaborative works. Student supervision requires theoretical understanding and a conceptual sense for helping students analyze problems that come their way, but also staying sensitive to communication, intuition, and their personal creative ideas. These are the skills needed in every artistic process, so maybe it has been good training for me and also helped me in creating my own piece, which had an actual rehearsal period that was rather short, intense, and fast-tempo.”

What’s like to create a new piece after a long break? “The workday at school is usually really hectic and there is a lot activity of every scale at any given time. When I was creating this piece, it was wonderful to be able to concentrate and immerse myself in one thing at a time. It was wonderful to make an artistic piece with creative, generous, accomplished, and talented artists. Creative work, especially when you have deadlines and a work group, inevitably involves a certain degree of stress and super-intensity. When you reach for something that is as yet just an idea that came up in rehearsals and you try to capture it and propel it forward, it’s a frenzied activity for everyone involved. I admit that I had, and I still have, stress because of my work position. Because so much time has passed, I feel that the reception of the piece could largely define my future, whether I have the possibility for working groups and funding for new works.”

What’s next? “My work relationship with the Theatre Academy will continue for some time and current questions in cultural policies will determine the larger picture in the develop- ment of dance. As far as artistic work, I definitely already have lots of ideas, but it’s really difficult to get funding. It took three years to acquire funding for AAA and if we weren’t for the Theatre Academy I would still be waiting. Personally what interests me are the problematics of abstraction and representation, the specificities and possibilities of live performance, the body and kinesthetics in an era of virtuality, the topic of process ontology and ecology in relation to composition and so on.”

KIRSI MONNI

Founding member of Zodiak Presents group, 1986


Numerous published articles and aca- demic papers

30 full-length choreographic pieces

BREAKDANCING AGAINST SCHOOL BULLYING

CHOREOGRAPHER ARIA TIILI leads Break the Fight! Project, which combats bullying in schools by means of breakdancing.

At the heart of the project are the dance piece Break the Fight – I was here! aimed at young people over the age of 13, and breakdancing, graffiti, beatboxing, DJing and rap workshops for 7–28 year olds, combing elements of street culture and run by industry professionals. The workshops provide a time and place for self-expression and dialogue about bullying.

“Young people who do not feel a sense of belongingness may find their own way to express themselves through the workshops. In rap workshops participants can rap in their own native language. Non-verbal dance for one is a great way to express yourself whatever your background,” says Tiili.

According to Tiili, the young people involved have spoken openly about bullying: “We emphasise that no one should be left alone when it comes to bullying. We also provide information on where to find peer support.”

Break the Fight! has reached over 3,000 young people, primarily in southern Finland, and the aim is to expand the operating model to cover all of Finland. “It would be fantastic if the project could be rolled out in every municipality in Finland. We want to encourage people involved in the local street culture scenes to join in with the project.”

Once Break the Fight! has conquered Finland, next up is the rest of the world in autumn 2017. The event and graffiti workshops will be held for street children in St Petersburg, Russia.
AALTOKOSKI AND the Iraqi musician Alawad got to know each other's work when Ali performed at Aaltokoski's 30th anniversary gala as a dance artist. The encounter sparked an interest in each other's art and a desire to attempt a collaboration – and their piece Ali & Alpo was born as if of its own accord.

Together Aaltokoski and Alawad explored the meeting of two cultures. Alawad chose traditional Arab music that fit Aaltokoski's movement.

"The themes of the Arab songs are very similar to the themes of Finnish popular music," Aaltokoski says. "Love, longing, and melancholy. Nostalgic music was no doubt also a comfort to Ali. Art is something that stays with you, something that can't be taken away."

While working on the dance piece, Alawad was an asylum seeker in Finland. His applications had been refused, and he feared he would be sent back to Iraq.

"The situation influenced how he interpreted the songs; they became even more emotional. He was really exhausted, and often had to stop playing. Sometimes he lost himself in his playing, and I would lie on the floor and listen with my eyes closed."

Just three weeks before the premiere, Alawad decided to flee Finland, fearing deportation. But they found time to record Alawad's playing – they didn't want to cancel the premiere.

"It was a horrible situation. But at the same time it gave me a powerful feeling that this work can't be sabotaged by anyone from the outside."

When Ali left the country, material about twenty minutes of the piece was ready. The dramaturgy, use of sound, and video recordings, as well as the beginning and end of the piece, had to be reinvented.

"I vented my desperation in movement and choreography. You're running, but you're not getting anywhere. My foremost feelings were powerlessness and disbelief that such a thing could be happening–we live in a constitutional state, after all. Finland has always opposed racism, but now refugee policy has tightened to the point that it's almost encroaching on international regulations," Aaltokoski says.

According to Aaltokoski, Alawad was an asylum seeker had no bearing on the project in the beginning. But suddenly the situation was turned on its head and seeking asylum became a part of the work: Alawad was persecuted in his home country because of his profession as a musician.

Aaltokoski and Alawad's working relationship continues to this day. They have been exchanging ideas for the ending of the piece and sharing news and also pictures of the performances.

"Ali has been a part of every performance," Aaltokoski says that his connection with Alawad has remained. He shows us the WhatsApp messages where they have been exchanging ideas for the ending of the piece and sharing news and also pictures of the performances.

"For now we’re presenting the piece as it is. But I’m sure that if Ali is alive, we’ll perform the piece with him present some day."

WHAT UNITES US

The piece and talking about it is sensitive not only for Aaltokoski but also for the audience. Aaltokoski describes the relationship with the audience as something unique.

"The audience discussions have been marked by warmth, openness, and a sense of community. People have been able to openly show their feelings, and many have cried. I've also been asked if I can tell them what to do about the situation. The conversations have become a part of the work, through them the audience participates not just in the performance but also in the processing of its themes."

Somewhat paradoxically, many have felt that in his absence Alawad is more present in the work than if he were physically present. "The people in the audience have brought him into the space."

What does Aaltokoski want to say through this work?

"If seeing the piece encourages people to face another person, I've succeeded. The world needs more empathy. ‘Compassion makes us human’ is also a sustaining theme of Aaltokoski Company."

WE WILL PERFORM THE WORK SO THAT ALI IS PRESENT.

Dancer and choreographer Alpo Aaltokoski, alone on a stripped-down stage, dances a duet with a video of Ali Alawad, his friend and a virtuoso oud player. Alawad should have been on stage but asylum politics intervened.
THREE ARTISTS whose recent works grapple with social issues are answering that question. Sanna Kekäläinen’s Hafed Collage of Differences and Fragility (2016) and Sonya Lindfors’s Noble Savage (2016) are explicitly political, and viewers who see Tuomo Railo’s Omnipotens are compelled to ask what kind of society drives an individual to shocking acts of violence.

Over the past decade, contemporary dance has developed in a more conceptual direction. Dance pieces are filled with speech and text, and this past year the texts were very political ones. But how can “mute” choreography be political? What means can contemporary dance use to influence our reality? Is it possible that contemporary dance needs spoken and written language to have a political impact?

The verbal turn of contemporary dance is perceptible in the artistic work of all three of these artists, and all of the above works are filled with text. Contemporary dance can, however, have an impact through means that are outside the reach of language. Tuomo Railo calls this “the politics of touch.” Dance is also better than many other art forms at expressing the politics of the body, as Sanna Kekäläinen has done in her works.

Sonya Lindfors’s NOIR? and Noble Savage are political dance pieces that bring the experience of otherness and racialization onto the stage to reveal the power structures that underlie the field of art itself. For Lindfors, the practice of art seems to be an experimental survey of its boundaries with activism, and thus the contexts of performance are seen as a part of their artistic content.
The multifaceted contemporary dance career of Tuomo Railo, the second artistic director of Dance Theater Glims & Gloms has been marked by a programmatic interest in the deepest human motivations. His trilogy of works Arka paikka (Sore Point, 2011), Aikojen lopun kvartetto (Quartet for the End of Time, 2013) and Omnipotens (2015), explore the individual in a psychoanalytic framework.

The All-Powerful Superego

The last piece in the trilogy, Omnipotens, grapples with the illusion of omnipotence. The piece is a ritualistic dance work that provokes the viewer to think about our deepest human tendencies. Railo used Åsne Seierstad’s novel One of Us, which dealt with the Utøan tragedy in Norway in 2011 as background material for the piece. He performs the monologue Anders B (2017), adapted from the same materials, along with the dance piece. The manuscript is also translated into English.

From a Freudian point of view it’s no accident that Omnipotens is the most political piece in the trilogy. The piece can be examined as a study on “the tentacles of the patriarchal system”, to borrow Railo’s phrase.

“We’ve seen the emergence of a strong populist, at times extreme right wing politics in the Nordic countries. The Utøan tragedy, for me, was a disturbing reminder that such a situation can turn like a thunder clap to violence,” Railo says.

A Political Artist?

Railo doesn’t feel a need for a profile as a political artist. As far as he’s concerned he isn’t creating anything “for any particular political instance to react to”. But he does see himself as political in “offering a place for shared experience and consideration of meaning”.

“Everything you put on stage is in some relation to reality and in that way is also political,” Railo points out. “Dance as an art form is inevitably a form that interprets humanity in so many ways that its aesthetics and politics are realized simultaneously. In some sense, having a unique voice is itself political.”

Listening to Railo sparks a question about the nature of the development of Western dance tradition. Does it really advance toward the liberation of our concept of the body and being human, as is sometimes thought, or does it just go from one frame of reference to another?
"In ballet’s roots in the French court the focal point was one person framed by a chorus. There was a political agenda in that: to reinforce the existing social structure, in which the Sun King represented a god." Those words crystallize what Sonya Lindfors feels is something central to her practice. “We forget that it’s political. There’s a political agenda in the fact that the body looks sublime and supported. It has to do with our ideals in relation to society.” Lindfors believes we ought to remember that all our choices are political in one way or another.

Politics in the Arts

Lindfors wants to be part of the discussion of repressive power structures and how to make the world more egalitarian. Her piece Noble Savage (2016) is political even in its title; it examines otherness and racialization.

In Noble Savage, as in her previous work NOIR?, all six performers are black. In its performances, the black body carries a history of being allowed on the stage only for the amusement of white viewers. In Noble Savage, the most important thing is the “black stage”, which tries to make the white gaze aware of itself, to place white in the position of “other”, and through that unpack white hegemony.

Lindfors says that the political nature of the piece arose from the very fact of who was on the stage, what they looked like and what their backgrounds were. She points out that explicitly stated themes aren’t the only political aspect of art. The context of a performance is an inextricable part of its political content.

“All my work deals with structures in one way or another, and one agenda I have is to make the field of the arts look at itself, to reveal its internal hierarchies and glass ceilings and shake the field up from the inside.” Lindfors feels that art can too easily reinforce its own narratives of victimhood and marginalization. “This is a dishonest defense strategy. As if artists had some magic wand that they could use to make the world a better place if they only had more resources.”

“Art isn’t automatically some kind of voice for feminism and diversity. The generic ethical, liberal, pure artist as such doesn’t exist. In the real world art is made for a lot of different reasons. The arts have the same problems as the rest of society,” she says. “The arts are in many ways really unequal and homogeneous. For instance, in dance especially we have a really odd gender imbalance: the overwhelming majority of dancers are women, but the artistic directors and other high-profile figures are usually men.”

Lindfors reveals something that was hidden even in the premise for this article. Why approach the political in art by limiting our interviews to artists who are considered political? “Politics doesn’t just mean challenging the prevailing order. The fact that something isn’t challenged is also political.”

Art and Activism

At the moment Sonya Lindfors is active in an international network that is reflecting on strategies of activism and art.

“The art is more ambivalent than the activism. The tactics of activism are an attempt to address the problems of society directly,” Lindfors says. Art and activism go hand in hand in her work. “I make dance pieces but I also write and give lectures. These things compliment each other. That doesn’t mean that I try to explain my art. There are just some things that you should intervene in more directly.”

“The ethos behind my practice is anti-racism and feminism,” Lindfors says. This kind of foundation of values leads her to choose and develop a political strategy broader than individual works. “But I find that everything I do is choreography and it’s all led by a strong ethos and ideology.”

SONYA LINDFORS, SELECTION OF WORKS

Noble Savage (2016)
Swag Lessons (ongoing lecture/performance concept)
NOIR? (2013)

Founder & artistic director of UrbanApa arts platform & festival

1. SONYA LINDFORS: Noble Savage Ernest Protasevics
2. SONYA LINDFORS: Noble Savage Sanna Käsmä
Choreographer Sanna Kekäläinen’s performances aren’t watched because they’re an instantly enjoyable or pleasant way to spend some time. Going to see Kekäläinen’s works is like going to therapy or to court: their purpose is not to entertain but to get closer to the truth.

The Body

How does a woman’s body exist? has been one of the central questions guiding Kekäläinen’s work. “Ever since I started to do my artistic work, one of my basic starting points has been the politics of the body.”

Over the course her career, contemporary dance in general has become more conceptual. This development has broadened dance’s expressive possibilities, but it has also enabled pasted-on themes and subjects in all kinds of pieces. In my opinion, the unique quality of Kekäläinen’s works lies in the way that their form and content, topic and experientiality, concept and body, are inseparable.

Diva Vulva (2015), which has also been performed in Paris, was subtitled The Body as a Symbol of Capitalism. Its disturbing images shake up our limited concept of the body, gender, pleasure, and the exercise of power.

Queer Elegies (2013), which toured in Cannes and Mexico, asks what is a woman and what is a man, and investigates how culture moulds identities and limits human variety.

Dedication

Kekäläinen’s long career on the margins of the arts hasn’t been an easy one. As a trailblazer in an evolving art form, she’s had a lot of mud flung at her. From her work Studien über Hysterie (1991) right up to the 2000’s, the reception of her work in Finland has been one of bewilderment. Nowadays Sanna Kekäläinen’s meaning as an artist is better understood, even in the mainstream media.

“I’m not intentionally uncompromising,” Kekäläinen explains. “It’s my way of existing. It’s a way to take a stand on what’s happening in the world. It’s been a major thing for me since I was young. I want to say something, share something. I’ve seen and experienced unfairness and injustice in the world. I want to do something about it.”

The Politics of the Day

“The whole thing we call ‘art’ is being called into question,” Kekäläinen says. “It’s becoming a curse word. We’re being reorganized as ‘manufacturers of good feelings.’” Kekäläinen seems genuinely worried. “I think there’s something fascist in making art to make people feel good.”

“All ideologies try to tame art,” she continues as she tells me about her new work, Whorescope (2017), whose subject she describes as “Art in the Era of Terror and Wellness Business.” “The ideology of middle class society is summed up in the idea of wellbeing, which can be obtained as a commodity-like service, with all its existential dimensions removed. This idea of wellbeing is irreconcilable with the current Western philosophy of art.”

Now more than ever, Kekäläinen feels, is a time for resistance, not surrender. “It’s important to open yourself up to what’s happening,” she says. “Now is the time to make new alternatives and possibilities visible: curiosity, tolerance, and lovingness.”

According to Kekäläinen, the power of art lies in “the moment of insight, recognition, sharing, in how it transcends feeling, time, gender, race, languages. It’s universal... when you let it be and don’t start creating art that serves a certain kind of social order.”

SANNA KEKÄLÄINEN, SELECTION OF WORKS

Whorescope (2017)
Hafed Collage of Differences and Fragility (2016)
THE BEAST – A Book in an Orange Tent (2011)
MEET THE NEW FACES!

Two versatile dance artists between life, choreography, body and nonconformity.

CAUGHT IN FRICTION BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE WORLD – EMMI VENNA

Emmi Venna wonders what kind of bodies and subjectivities our time and current political culture will generate and provoke: “How can we resist normativity in our bodies? Communities based on voluntariness and micro scenes, which can work within their own rules, often demonstrate corporeality that’s more interesting than in the professional art scene.”

Venna has set up a project together with director Ossi Koskelainen: Post-Michael Jackson Institute of Consciousness. “Michael Jackson is the embodiment of a spectacle, and my contention is that we can understand the state of the contemporary world and possibly the future through studying Michael Jackson’s body.” The working group has approached the enigma of Michael Jackson’s life through different events, for example at an artistic/scientific seminar and an all-night wake. In Oslo at Parallel Lives, the Institute set up an interactive, intimate therapy room to look at memories and affects related to Michael Jackson.

Emmi Venna works from the lived-in body’s experience and aims to configure links between life, choreography, body and culture: “I try to avoid enacting the body and to communicate more on the friction that is created between others’ own bodily experience and one’s relationship with the world.”

NEW FACES

KATI KOROSU – DANCING FOR EQUALITY

Kati Korosuo, a dance artist, is pleased with the variety of experiences and approaches she comes across in her profession. For example in recent times, her work as a performer has led her to consider uncensored corporeality, free from social conventions, and to confront human-animal hybrids in Maija Nurmio’s work Oh, Forest.

Having studied in Turku, Philadelphia and Stockholm and graduated with a Master’s degree as a dancer in 2011 in Helsinki, Korosuo developed Dances to a Beat, a dance technique and a tool for instant choreography, in 2013. The technique is based on improvisation, repetition and rhythm. She has taught it around the world, from Israel to USA, to students and professional dancers for example at Ivo Dimchev’s studio in Brussels and in Tanzania, in children’s homes in England, to asylum seekers and disability support workers. The third work in the Morphing series of performances based on the technique, will be completed in autumn.

“More extensively I delve into the dances to a Beat practice, the more it feels essential. Everyone is capable of learning the technique but it challenges even the most experienced of dancers. Everyone’s emotional and bodily history is an equal starting point for dancing. This can result in an unravelling of socially constructed hierarchies about movements and of social hierarchies.”

The interest in performer-centred, instant choreography and dramaturgy led Korosuo to found the Festival of Instant Choreography. “It’s brilliant that we’ve gained a new forum for instant choreography internationally. I hope the new festival will enable us to think laterally and to promote transparency and connection with each other. The planning of new strategies will continue.”

KOROSU SETS UP A PROJECT TOGETHER WITH DANCER MIJA AHO, ANNA-MARI KARVONEN AND ANNA-MUSTOENEN: POST-MJ ERA INSTITUTE OF CONSCIOUSNESS. "MICHAEL JACKSON IS THE EMBODIMENT OF A SPECTACLE, AND MY CONTENTION IS THAT WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE STATE OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD AND POSSIBLY THE FUTURE THROUGH STUDYING MICHAEL JACKSON’S BODY.”
A GREY FRIDAY morning in April in an industrial area of east Helsinki. Choreographer Jarkko Mandelin’s principal dancer Anni Koskinen is in the depths of a warehouse warming up for an evening duet.

They’re preparing for the 10-year anniversary festival of Apinatarha (Art Cooperative Monkey Garden), of which Mandelin is a founding member. “We have time. Anni knows how to warm up by herself,” the friendly choreographer says when I worry that the interview in the group’s office is taking too long.

When our chat is over, Mandelin puts on his practice clothes and starts rehearsing the duet with Anni.

Through rapid leaps, sensational lifts, tricky turns and drops, there is no gritting of teeth. Relaxed movement is their alpha and omega. Mandelin’s body heats up and the sweat is soon flying. “I turned 37 this summer,” he chuckles as he performs the physically grueling movements.

In the autumn 2017, Mandelin and Koskinen are headed to Strasbourg as guests of the Sead Academy, where they will teach and rehearse a piece for the school’s Bodhi project.

Jarkko Mandelin makes use of every possible technique in his works, where the dancers fly with a dog and dangle from the tops of tall poles.

Aino Huovio
the aesthetic doesn’t get in the way of the kinetic experience.”

It’s important to Mandelin to be able to create an honest spirit and a community of mutual trust in his teaching. “For the students, and all of us, it’s ultimately important to be seen as we are and to be accepted. It builds professional self-esteem, gives dancers the wings they need in dance. The skills will come eventually if the psyche can be brought along to help in achieving the skills.”

FROM BALLET TO CHINESE POLE

Jarkko Mandelin’s own road to his profession led through amateur theater. “When I was thirteen we were required to take ballet lessons and I also started practicing breakdancing.” His enthusiasm for dance was immediate. It was so intense, in fact, that for the next six months he trained in beginning ballet with classes of 6 and 7-year-old girls! From training at the Finnish National Ballet School he moved on to contemporary dance classes at the University of Arts and graduated with a Masters Degree in choreography in 2009.

In Mandelin’s method, choreographic work and teaching are seamlessly interwoven. “Teaching is a good way to stay in the mix, to investigate the possibilities of movement.” In his teaching he searches for the internal logic of the movements themselves.

“Building choreography and developing a series of movements is like solving a jigsaw puzzle. But the most important thing isn’t what happens over the course of an hour on stage. In my work what’s more important are all the things we’ve investigated and discovered over the year as a group. The performances are mileposts of those discoveries.”

Mandelin’s most recent piece, Animals (2016), explores human distance and closeness. How momentum is created, how far a dancer can throw a partner, how high they can leap over a partner, what ways they can use to lift a partner by the leg as quickly as possible. The movements can be dangerous, but a dancer can’t afford to panic. It’s a fierce kind of dance that demands primitive instincts and animal-like motor functions.

In Animals Mandelin also explored the physical principles of the lever. The Chinese pole, familiar from the circus, was a source of inspiration when the dancers practiced climbing and moving atop a 2.5 meter pole for the piece. “I wanted to simulate climbing a tree and moving from tree to tree.” Climbing the poles raised the dancers into a new sphere. “At first the constant falls were tough on the ankles and staying up at an angle felt quite impossible.”

A FLYING CHILD AND A DANCING ALASKAN MALAMUTE

Mandelin’s aim is to never do two dance pieces alike. “I make an effort to always understand my own instrument in a new way and I want to use everything I’ve learned about moving in my choreographed pieces.”

Rohkeat (The Brave, 2015) was a work for the whole family that featured Mandelin’s six-year-old son, superhero acrobat Oiva, who has been dancing since he was three, and charmed the audience with his stage charisma. “The father-and-son paired acrobatics were seamless. It was a little scary sometimes, too, when the boy went whizzing through the air like a human cannonball.” (Helsingin Sanomat newspaper, Feb. 13, 2015)

Myrskyjä vesilasissa (Tempests in Teapots, 2014), a piece with two men and one “laconic woman gardener”, drew its ideas from Japanese samurai and kabuki traditions.

Mandelin’s popular 2013 piece Wolfpack attracted a lot of
media attention because it featured his magnificent sled dog Ansa. In Wolfpack, an Alaskan malamute, howled like a wolf, sprinted on stage for the running scenes, and tussled with her master. When the dancers lay down on the floor, Ansa threw herself down to lie on her side, too, content to wait for the next running scene, when she could play and wrestle with abandon again. In Wolfpack, Mandelin wanted to examine the boundaries of group behavior, suss out the shared rules of the pack, and make visible the tensions between individual and group.

ON FAMILY AND LOVE
Juggling a busy life with three small children and two dogs, Mandelin says that the whirl of activity sometimes steers him to ideas for his work. Even Ansa initially came onstage by accident, when Mandelin got a solo gig on short notice and had nowhere to leave the dog. “When I got there I realized that I could bring her on stage with me.”

The meaning of family is a repeating theme in interviews with Mandelin. The reason may be in his childhood, when his parents unconditionally supported his stubborn, passionate interest in dance classes.

Mandelin stresses that the dancers committed to his own ensemble, Kinetic Orchestra, are the most important thing in his work. “If a dancer doesn’t want what I want, I feel like I’ve failed.” Practicing and performing together, the group is like an extended family that’s also able to make interesting work together. “There can be moments in the group when a dancer’s personal problems effect things in such a way that for a week we can’t get much done. When that happens, you have to give it time, because what seems like a period of idleness will always give something back.

The most important thing is love, respect, and trust for your workmates. Even if you fail, that connection won’t let you down. It carries you and warms you.”

THE FAST EAT THE SLOW
When Mandelin became a choreographer and founded Kinetic Orchestra, he realized that he couldn’t compete with the wages of larger dance groups. The field of Finnish contemporary dance is bustling and the best dancers are in high demand.

“In this field, networking with the right people is the bottom line. You can’t waste any time after graduation.” Although the silent shared regard of the field is something rarely spoken aloud, a reputation as a sought-after choreographer, or a less interesting one, can spread rapidly. “I want to show my colleagues that my community is the place to be. To be in it demands athletic abilities and intelligent content that values dancers. You also have to be able to scent the spirit of the time before it happens.”

“I have to prove that I can act as the leader of the group without forcing them. There should be good ideas and fairness.” Mandelin’s next piece, all-male-panel, is about solving climate change. How do you make a dance piece about a seated seminar, and solve world-class problems while you’re at it?

“It’s a tragic joke. We’ve all seen that power doesn’t suit everyone. But it would be fantastic to be able to make the world a better place through dance. If this piece doesn’t do that, at least we can laugh at it!”

Writer is journalist and dance critic
FOR SOUND DESIGNER HEIDI SOIDINSALO (b. 1983), sharing thoughts within the working group and her presence at all stages of the work process form the central planks in artistic work. When designing, for example, she ponders how the potential concept of the performance is reflected in the sound and, at the same time, she considers if a sound concept could open up an overall solution for the performance. It’s important to Soidinsalo that the sound of a performance is noticed and the aural experience is sensed corporeally as part of the performance.

Soidinsalo, who has a master’s degree (MA) in Sound Design, feels that the new generation of sound designers develops ever-new answers to the scope of a sound designer’s role. Questions about composing and a designer appearing on stage crop up more and more. Soidinsalo herself has been on stage, e.g. when working with the Vibes collective but prefers the idea of performing through sound: “I’m present when the sound is.”

For her, the most important processes are ones that challenge her to rethink her own way of working. At its best, this thinking has resulted in a carefully thought-out sound design for Masi Tiitta’s work Flute. The design can also be regarded as a thirty-minute stand-alone composition. Soidinsalo is part of the WALINAKUS group and she will create the design for the group’s sound-based work Private Dancer jointly with sound designer Jussi Mattikainen.

According to Soidinsalo, who works in different performing arts, the human voice has gained an increasingly central role in dance, and as a result, sound designers should consider the nature of the spoken language and the use of a performer’s voice in contemporary dance. In all her design work Soidinsalo aims to ensure a spectator realises he or she is listening and that listening is one of the conditions for a performance to happen.
JANI-MATTI SALO (b. 1984) is a lighting designer who concentrates on drama, dance and installations. In addition to his master’s degree (MA) in Lighting Design, he has also studied media. Salo’s practice is guided by an artisan identity, a physical marshalling of space, ideas and materials. Professional development and a tolerance of incompleteness are constantly present in his design work.

The work process is never the same for Salo. With increasing frequency, he is invited to working groups, which are often put together before a great deal is known about the work. This may lead to a two- or three-year process with the creative team before the premiere. This year, Salo will collaborate in Jaakko Pietiläinen’s and Eeva Muilu’s work PET at the Kiasma Theatre, Helsinki Museum of Contemporary Art, and in Cirkus Cirkör’s work Under on the main stage of Dance House in Stockholm.

In Salo’s designs, light becomes an inseparable part of the content of a work. Because he considers language too abstract a tool, he contributes to works via concrete spatial proposals, always aiming to create a strong sensation of cross-disciplinary coherence. Salo himself says: “I’ve also participated in works in which the role of lighting is significant and challenging from the very start, and in working groups in which I’m able to operate on equal terms with other members and creative areas.”

MINNA TIIKKAINEN (b. 1969) likes to design lighting for experimental or medium-sized dance productions. She has also acted as designer in some large-scale performances, including Jefta van Dinther’s and Deborah Hay’s works for the Swedish Cullberg Ballet. In addition to having a master’s degree (MA) in lighting design, Tiikkainen has trained as a graphic artist and studied set design at Riitvald Academie in Amsterdam. In Finland, Tiikkainen initially worked in theatre but transferred to contemporary dance when she moved to the Netherlands in 2001.

She describes her design as restrained, with finding the essential as her aim. “I don’t strive to create changing ‘lightscapes’ or to pinpoint different spaces but I want to arrive at a big picture, within which changes of atmosphere and time can be realised,” Tiikkainen says. In the past few years, she’s been interested in the movement of light; that is, in design based on a spectator’s perception. For instance, in Jefta van Dinther’s work ORINO, the movement of light creates the visual basis and concept of the work.

Tiikkainen’s design work is influenced by the fact that she won’t herself be at the lighting control desk during a tour. After the first night, a lighting technician assumes the responsibility of realising the performance, that’s why Tiikkainen aims at simple and pragmatic solutions. This year she will have time to design the lighting for the premiers of works by five choreographers: Tiina Tarpgaard (Denmark), Gunilla Heilborn (Sweden), and her established partners van Dinther (Netherlands/Sweden), Nicole Beutler (Netherlands) and Mette Ingvartsen (Denmark).

Tiikkainen believes that the widespread interest in lighting has been boosted by well-known works by artists such as Olafur Eliasson and by light festivals organised in different parts of Europe. Tiikkainen’s design has been repeatedly acknowledged in the reviews. She thinks this is partly thanks to the choreographers — they have emphasised the importance of teamwork in the creative process.


Light becomes an inseparable part of the content of a work.

For Salo, the most ground-breaking experiences are the ones, in which the stage is not subject to strict control or pre-defined boundaries and in which any member of the creative team has space to explore any ideas freely.

Salo himself has organised workshops to which he invites artists to collaboratively investigate space and light without any production pressure. “The time of hierarchical thinking is over, we need to aim at the horizontality of teamwork,” Salo opines.
Studying lighting and sound design in Finland is focused on art, which is unique in the world. In addition to the basics of their own field, lighting and sound designers embark on foundation studies in art: history of theatre and dancing, dramaturgy, fine arts, aesthetics etc.

Tomi Humalisto, Professor of Lighting Design explains: “The studies nourish the areas of artistic thinking, observation, knowledge of traditions and technical knowhow. Because lighting and sound design is studied at the same academy with students of theatre and dance, the collective creative performance process becomes familiar to design students as members of the Training Theatre productions, which can amount to as many as 40–50 premieres a year.”

The three-year study programme results in a bachelor’s degree (BA) in theatre studies, and the students are able to deepen their own range of expressiveness in more individual directions in a two-year master’s programme. All the lighting and sound designers interviewed in the article have gained a master’s in theatre studies.

“From the very beginning our concept was to produce artists whose paint brushes take the form of spotlights and sound equipment,” says Esa Blomberg, former director and lecturer at the institute of Lighting and Sound Design.

In Finland, it has been possible to study lighting and sound design at a degree level at the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki for the past thirty years. During this period, the job description of a lighting and sound professional has changed from a technician to an artist and an equal member of the artistic working group.

Mikko Hynninen (b. 1972) works both as a lighting designer and a sound designer, added to which he also designs spaces. Hynninen has acted as designer for works by Meg Stuart (US/Belgium) and Doris Uhlich (Austria) in addition to several works by David Wampach (France). In the past few years, he has designed for Finnish dance artists Iree Mihal, Maja Hirvanen and Veli Lehtovaara. His latest work with the Finns has been with Kirsii Monoi in spring 2017.

Hynninen has been involved in lighting and sound design in performing arts from 1995. Apart from a master’s degree in theatre and drama, Hynninen gained an MA at Helsinki Academy of Fine Arts in 2008. In Hynninen’s own words: “When you’ve created your own works of art, it impacts on your identity and way of working. It’s challenging, at times, to find the boundary between designing for a larger entity and your own piece of work.”

Hynninen wants to avoid repetition and aims to be able to be blown over by a design again and again. His task – whether it consists of lighting, sound or space design – amounts to implanting the narrative language of the tool in question into the body of the whole work. The spatiality of materials is a central element in Hynninen’s lighting and sound design, in other words, their role in creating the architecture of the performance.

In addition to performing arts, Hynninen also occasionally cooperates with pictorial artists and with architects in concepts for urban planning. However, dance constitutes his favourite art form because dance and lighting and sound design have a great deal in common in being nonverbal.

Writer is a dance critic and freelance writer

VELI LEHTOVAARA: Clandestine sites: displaced, Spatial and light design. Mikko Hynninen © Yoshi Omori | Zodiak 2015

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JOHANNA NUUTINEN
INVESTS IN PHYSICAL IMAGINATION

After 15 years of job security with the Finnish National Ballet, dancer and choreographer Johanna Nuutinen is now opting for freedom, diving into an uncertain freelance future. Following her breakthrough with the multi-award-winning dance film Me – Story of a Performance, she now has her sights set even higher. “I want to focus on building an international career. Success requires respect and awareness of what works in different cultural contexts.”

SHE IS ABOUT 12 years old in the photo I have in front of me. The same intense and resolute look in her eyes. We studied together at the National Ballet. I remember her as a soldier who never gave up. Even from an early stage, Johanna Nuutinen had a highly professional approach to work. “I got that from my father, a photographer, with whom I worked a lot as a model when I was a child. That nurtured my work ethic. I also learned a lot about production work and entrepreneurship.”

In February she handed in her resignation notice, despite not yet having found out that she would receive a three-year artist’s grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation.

“I’ve always followed my intuition and have never walked away from something I felt strongly about doing. I poured my heart and soul into my work for the National Ballet during my 15 years in the company and 10 years in the Ballet School. But everything has its time. Everyday life won’t change much from how it has been for the last two years I’ve spent on a leave, which, alongside dance, have been defined by staying up into the early hours sending festival applications and the like.”

At the National Ballet Nuutinen has worked with many of the biggest name choreographers in the world of dance. Ohad Naharin, Jiří Kylián, William Forsythe and Tero Saarinen, to name just a few.

Jnukinen is well aware that she is leaving behind her the security an institution provides – a monthly salary, paid holidays, sick leave, a pension – all things that many freelancers and artists can only dream of. “I would have had ten years left until retirement. But a lot can happen in ten years. Of course it’s nerve-wracking to go it alone with nothing to fall back on. It’s a case of survival of the fittest.”

The National Ballet’s choreography workshops and performances were crucial springboard for Nuutinen allowing her to create her own choreography for the company. The first years in a company are often tough, and many younger dancers start off as substitutes. The workshops offered a chance to show a creative side. I remember seeing her in a whole new light. On stage she is intense and captivating. “The workshops are an important way to unearth new talent. It was a challenging platform on which to test out ideas, and to learn how the entire production phase works.”

A BREAKTHROUGH VIA FILM

Nuutinen’s major breakthrough on the international stage came with the short film Me – Story of a Performance, which was created in 2013 in collaboration with Jopsu and Timo Ramu of Musutta Ltd. The minute-long trailer is visually breathtaking and in today’s digital world it has spread far and wide via social media and festival applications. The film has been shown at over 45 film festivals around the world (Festival FIVE in Spain, Miami Short Film Festival, FIFA Montreal, Cinedans Amsterdam, San Francisco Dance Film Festival…).

I knew that I would be returning to my job at the National Ballet after my job alternation leave, and I wanted to have something I could develop on the side, and it worked. It will still take some time for me to get established. The film was completed in 2013, and three years later I managed to tell a durational performance concept that includes the film to contemporary museums.”

Nuutinen developed the film further...
into the piece Me, where, alongside the film, she provides a live improvisation, creating a performance in collaboration with the audience. The piece is a site-inspired work for museums and galleries, and serves as an example of the kind of durational works Nuutinen finds captivating.

“The longest I’ve gone in terms of improvisation is nine hours. I eat and go to the toilet in the moments when no one is watching. I want to use the work to break down personal boundaries and explore how audience members react to touch.”

The solo piece Hatched was born when a festival director in Hong Kong saw the trailer of Me in Singapore, and asked Nuutinen to create a new piece for the 2014 i-Dance festival. Hatched takes use of power, anonymity and identity as its starting points.

Social eMotions is based on the results of a two-year scientific and artistic study carried out in collaboration with a research team led by Tommy Himberg, PhD from Aalto University’s Department of Neuroscience and Biomedical Engineering, and Nuutinen’s partner, performing and producer Jarkko Lehmus. The project studied emotions in a social context from the viewpoints of neuroscience, dance, music and visual art. One of the biggest challenges the team faced was first finding a neutral movement which they could start from.

“People in the same space have an emotional effect on each other. Trying to hold an emotionally neutral movement while the other person was dancing full-out romantic love or loathing was very challenging. It was a very interesting and educational experiment, and one that I have been able to draw upon in my working process. Personally, I often start with feelings, but it is useful to be able to return to the zero point if I need to.”

In the resulting performance, the audience can use a mobile application to influence the performers’ emotional content.

A PERSONAL UNIVERSE
As a child, Nuutinen could often be found drawing. She liked creating three-dimensional architectural spaces. Still today she often jots down her works on paper when starting work on something new.

“First, I build a world of sound, the visual and other moods. I then physically step into that universe.”

“First, I build a world of sound, the visual and other moods. I then physically step into that universe.”

Recurring themes in Nuutinen’s works are identity, metamorphosis, and how the body and mind are influenced by fatigue and the duration of the performance. What happens if you see a fifth or sixth version, and how does the piece take shape in different spaces? She has travelled the world studying different movement practices, including Ohad Naharin’s Gaga and Butoh with Yoshiro Ohno in Japan. In addition to the dance, the visual elements and video are also important parts of Nuutinen’s multidisciplinary works. “A video image constitutes an expansion of reality, another dimension.”

FOCUS ON ASIA
Besides creating a stronger contact network in Finland, Nuutinen also has her sights on establishing an international career. At the moment her attention is focused on Asia.

“In a new culture you develop further and can challenge your own perspectives. How success is achieved internationally is dependent on the artists themselves—you have to become your own business card and be aware of the kind of environments in which your pieces are presented in. It can take a number of years to establish yourself. Success requires respect and awareness of what works in different cultures.”

Nuutinen has not ruled out establishing her own company in the future, but is keen to emphasise that this would require finding a suitable person to take care of the management side of things.

Her three-year plan includes activities such as organising a variety of workshops for dance, circus and theatre artists lead by international master teachers of different movement methods.

“It is important to me that I share the knowledge I find interesting and work with the group to test ourselves through improvisation. It won’t be focused solely on dance but rather on movement—physical imagination.”

PROFILE:
Johanna Nuutinen
Lives in: Helsinki
Age: 34
This directory offers an overview of the Finnish dance field. It lists dance companies, festivals and events, production centres and regional dance centres in Finland. Discover information about professional dance education and organisations, and more about dance artists and choreographers at www.danceinfo.fi.

DANCE COMPANIES

DANCE COMPANIES WITHIN ARTISTIC INSTITUTIONS

FINNISH NATIONAL BALLET
Helsinki
Contact: Sampo Kivelä, artistic administrator
Artistic Director: Kenneth Greve
www.operaballet.fi
About 80 performances and 3–5 premières per season. Also works by contemporary choreographers, such as Tero Saarinen, Jorma Elo, Jiri Kylian, John Neumeier, Alexei Ratmansky and Ohad Naharin. The Ballet employs 77 dancers representing 21 nationalities, plus 15 performers in its Youth Company. Genres: classical ballet, contemporary ballet, contemporary dance, young audiences

HELSINKI DANCE COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Jyrki Karttunen, house choreographer
www.hdc.fi
The biggest contemporary dance company in Finland with 10 dancers. HDC performers are known for performing physically demanding contemporary dance and expressive dance theatre. Helsinki Dance Company’s home is the Helsinki City Theatre. Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre

PUBLICLY FUNDED DANCE COMPANIES

AB DANCE COMPANY / AURINKOBALETTI
Turku
Contact: Katja Lehmanns, manager & Urmas Poolamets, artistic director
www.aurinkobaletti.fi
AB is known as a constantly evolving, high-quality contemporary dance group which is not afraid to venture outside the limits of its own genre. Its repertoire includes productions for both adults and children by Finnish and international choreographers. The home stage of the company is at Manilla, a beautifully restored former factory on the banks of the Aura River in Turku. Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performances for children

DANCE THEATER ERI
Turku
Contact: Maarit Keto-Seppälä, producer
www.eri.fi
Dancer-choreographers Tiina Lindfors, Lassi Sairela and Eeva Soini founded Dance Theater ERI in 1989. Over the past 28 years ERI has built up a repertoire that now includes more than 300 works. Every year they produce around 110 premieres, of which four or five are premières. Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre

DANCE THEATER HURJARUUTH
Helsinki
Contact: info@hurjaruuth.fi
www.hurjaruuth.fi
Hurjaruuth is a dynamic dance theatre company founded in 1981. During time it has given over 100 premières, completed dozens of foreign tours from Tanzania to Taiwan and provided work for an astonishing number of dance, circus and theatre professionals. The productions combine modern dance with visual arts and circus with music. Hurjaruuth has an own venue at Helsinki’s Cable Factory. Genres: Dance Theatre, performances for young audiences, dance festival

DANCE THEATRE MD
Tampere
Contact: Anniina Kumpuniemi, managing director
www.transittheaternrld.fi
Ranging from dazzling dynamics to warmhearted comedy, Dance Theatre MD’s broad repertoire features shows from classic fairy tales for children to contemporary dance pieces for adults. MD also tours actively in Finland and abroad. MD’s dancer-choreographers are as well frequent visitors in various theatre and opera productions. Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre

DANCE THEATRE MINIMI
Kuopio
Contact: Riikka Huulimalainen, artistic director
www.minimi.fi
Minimi performs both in Finland and abroad, on its home stage and on tour, in traditional stages and on the streets. Minimi wants to sustain and develop the...
DANCE THEATRE RAATIKKO

Vantaa

Contact: Marja Korholo, theatre director

www.raatikko.fi

Founded in 1972, Raatikko has its own venue in Vantaa and also performs on tour. Raatikko creates dance pieces for children, young people and adults, often combining dance, theatre and circus.

Over 300 performances per year, with 2 to 4 premiers, 150 audience events and over 10,000 spectators.

Genres: Dance theatre, performances for young audiences

DANCE THEATRE RIMPPAREMMI

Rovaniemi

Contact: Matti Paloniemi, artistic director

www.ruukkipaloniemi.fi

Finland’s northernmost professional dance theatre offers a unique mix of Finnish folk dance and contemporary dance. They are about 130 performance events annually and have toured in more than 20 countries. Also a repertoire of folk dance and music performances.

Genres: Dance theatre, folk dance, contemporary dance, performances for young audiences

GLIMS & GLOMS DANCE THEATRE

Espoo

Contact: Tuomo Rallo, artistic director

www.glimsandgloms.com

The Glims & Gloms dance company was founded in 1999 by Simo Heissanen and Tuomo Rallo. G&G’s works are characterised by stylish and inventive visuals and multi-layered themes.

Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performances for young audiences
EHKA-PRODUCTION
Helsinki
Contact: ehkatuotanto@gmail.com
www.ehka.net
Dance productions, collaborations, residencies, the annual XS festival and more. Ekhä hosts the contemporary art space Kutomo, which consists of two beautiful studios. Founded in 2004.
Genres: New dance, multidisciplinary productions, site specific pieces, live art, contemporary dance, performance, community dance.

KINETIC ORCHESTRA
Contact: Jenni Kivela, choreographer, producer
www.jennikivela.com
In just a short time, this group has created a strong and recognisable style to become one of the most interesting Finnish contemporary dance companies. The movement-based content and philosophy of their work bring together dance techniques, street dance attitudes and circus-like agility.
Genres: Contemporary dance

JENNI KIVELA & KIND PEOPLE
Helsinki
Contact: Jenni Kivela, choreographer, producer
www.jennikivela.com
Creating dance performances since 2002 that combine features from dance and theatre and move between the conceptual and the concrete. Jenni Kivela has a strong and recognisable style. Recently she worked with a piece for children called Kylli the Dog and the un-barkable lightness of being.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, young audiences

K&C KEKALAINEN & COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Liisa Pentti
www.liisapentti.com
Liisa Pentti + Co is based on the continuously evolving process of asking new questions in contemporary society. The company performs and tours in Finland and abroad. It organizes training for professionals and non-professionals, and curates and organizes events with themes related to the performing arts and their future.
Genres: Post-contemporary dance and performance

KAVIE BLIND SPOT
Helsinki
Contact: Heidi Masalin, info.katve@gmail.com
www.katve.info
Katve [blind spot] is a contemporary dance collective producing fresh and versatile danceworks for adults and young audiences. Humanity, imagination and resilience are the core values of Katve [blind spot], led by choreographers Heidi Masalin and Virva Talonen.
Genres: Contemporary dance

KINDELL ORCHESTRA
Contact: Jarkko Mandelin, artistic director
www.kinetteorchestra.fi
In just a short time, this group has created a strong and recognisable style to become one of the most interesting Finnish contemporary dance companies. The movement-based content and philosophy of their work bring together dance techniques, street dance attitudes and circus-like agility.
Genres: Contemporary dance

MAMIA COMPANY
Vanitas
Contact: Nina Mamma, choreographer
www.mamiaCOMPANY.com
Mamia Company is a contemporary dance theatre. The company’s performances deal with contemporary topics, the human condition and society.
Genres: Contemporary dance to classical theatre

MIA MALVINIEMI COMPANY
Vasa
Contact: Mia Malviniemi, artistic director, choreographer
www.malviniemi.fi
Choreographer Mia Malviniemi has created contemporary dance works since 1996, and her company, based on Finland’s west coast, was established in 2011. The company produces mainly stage works but there are also site-specific performances in repertoire. Malviniemi often brings together live music and contemporary dance in her works.
Genres: Contemporary dance

PETRI KEKONEN COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Petri Kokkonen, choreographer, Maria Junno, producer
www.kekkonen.com
Genres: Contemporary dance

PETRA PUKKINEN
Helsinki
Contact: Jarkko Mandelin, artistic director
www.pukkinen.com
Genres: Contemporary dance

PETRI KEKONEN COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Petri Kokkonen, choreographer, Maria Junno, producer
www.kekkonen.com
Genres: Contemporary dance

PORA DANCE COMPANY
Pori
Contact: Mikko Lampinen or Riku Lehtopolku
www.poridancecompany.com
Pori Dance Company aims to further the understanding and encourage tolerance through dance. It emphasizes a message of physicality as a means of exploring the imagination. Most of the company’s repertoire is NADP combines art and science in international productions. NADP focuses on historical and cultural themes through contemporary art, lecture series and dining. At the core of its stage works are a wide dynamic movement range, a close synthesis of movement and light, and a holistic aesthetic visuality.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performance/live art

RASA COLLECTIVE
Contact: Titta Court or Marjo Selin
www.poridancecompany.com
Rasa Collective is a contemporary dance theatre company that has performed in Europe, Asia, South Africa, Germany, Russia, North America, France, and many more.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performance/live art

ROHTA COMPANY
Kajaani
Contact: Sauli Koivinen, artistic director, choreographer
www.rotacompany.fi
Founded 15 years ago, Rohta [Finnish for ‘permafrost’) is an open-minded contemporary dance production company. It produces unique, strong dance performances that arise from local and global issues. Rohta belongs to the Regional Dance Centre of Northern Finland and employs both dance artists and audio-visual artists.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre and applied dance

SAINE ENSEMBLE
Rasepori
Contact: Anna Saine
www.saineensemble.fi
Saine Ensemble is an independent dance collective producing fresh and versatile danceworks for adults and young audiences. Humanity, imagination and resilience are the core values of Kavie Blinda, led by choreographers Heidi Masalin and Virva Talonen.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre and applied dance

RUTA COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Miikko Kallinen, AD/choreographer
www.av-arkki.fi
The Company is a production company of artists from various disciplines. New creations are mainly video dance/animation and interactive choreographic works.
Genres: Contemporary dance, audiovisual

NIINA AIRASKEN DANCE PRODUCTIONS (NADP)
Turku
Contact: Nina Airaksinen, choreographer, photographer, filmmaker
www.nadp.fi
NADP combines art and science in international productions. NADP focuses on historical and cultural themes through contemporary art, lecture series and dining. At the core of its stage works are a wide dynamic movement range, a close synthesis of movement and light, and a holistic aesthetic visuality.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre, performance/live art

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www.rotacompany.fi
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Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre and applied dance

SATU TUOMISTO +COMP
Helsinki
Contact: Satu Tuomisto, choreographer
www.satu TUOMISTO.com
Sweaty physicality, explicit emotions and experimental choreographic challenges.
Genres: Contemporary dance, dance theatre
SUSANNA LEINONEN COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Ninni Perko, artistic director and choreographer
www.susannaleinonen.com
Sivuun Ensemble, founded by Ninni Perko, is a multidisciplinary collective. The Ensemble’s performances are intense conversations between different art forms. Motion, music, image and text entwine into a collage of entities, opening seminal interpretations to current issues, significant for individuals and communities alike. Genres: theatre, multidisciplinary productions, community dance

MYRSKYRYHMA
Helsinki
Contact: Mervi Leivo, producer
www.myrskyryhma.com
Founded in 2003. Their work is based on the urge to take dance to people in the midst of their natural environment – in places where dance performances are not a familiar sight. Genres: performances and workshops for senior citizens, contemporary dance theatre, dance film

TUSUMI DANCE THEATRE
Helsinki
Contact: Salla Korja-Paloniemi, managing director
www.tusumi.com
Tusumi Dance Theatre produces 2–3 new performances per year and has a large repertoire to tour with. Tusumi finds its strength from exploring folklore and creating new artistic ways to bring it on stage. Tusumi’s performers are known for their skills in contemporary dance, folklore dance, singing and physical theatre. Genres: Dance theatre, folklore dance, live music performance, contemporary dance

WILLMAN DANCE COMPANY
Helsinki
Contact: Marjaettu Willman, artistic director
www.willmandancecompany.com
Willman Dance Company brings together artists who share a passion for dance and stage art. The goal of the company is to create original contemporary dance and dance theatre pieces that focus on the central questions of humanity. Genres: contemporary dance, dance theatre

THE TEMPEST GROUP

PRODUCTION CENTRES

BARKER-THEATRE, A STAGE FOR INDEPENDENT ART
Turku
Contact: Nina Remvall
www.barkertheater.fi
Barker-theatre is a production house founded in 1997. It hosts various dance productions, provides rehearsal space and offers also possibilities for work-in-progress performances and workshops. Barker also hosts a summer residence for dance artists (applications in January–February).

JOJO - OULU DANCE CENTRE
Oulu
Contact: Helena Lindqvist, managing director
www.jojo.fi
Jojo – Oulu Dance Centre is a dance production house in Northern Finland. Jojo runs an annual international OuluDanceFestival in September and a year-round dance programme consisting of its own productions and guest performances. Jojo also hosts an Artists’ Residency with an active international exchange programme. Jojo is one of the four organisations that form the Regional Dance Centre of Northern Finland.

PARKANMAA REGIONAL DANCE CENTRE Tampere
Contact: Pia Kulin, managing director
www.tanssiamuontamass.fi
Regional centre for dance in Central Finland. Parkanmaa Dance Centre and creates work opportunities for professionals. Organises the Tanssi Aika festival in August.

REGIONAL DANCE CENTRE OF EASTERN FINLAND / ITAK
Kuopio
Contact: Eeva Eloanta, executive producer
www.itak.fi
Promotes dance, creates work opportunities for professionals, offers training, and supports dance production in Eastern Finland. Organises the Paikallilaise festival in June and the Lonely in the Rain? Festival in November. ITAK also manages the Sotku venue in Kuopio.

REGIONAL DANCE CENTRE IN NORTHERN FINLAND
This regional centre is formed of four companies/producers in the area: www.jojo.fi / www.routacompany.fi / www.fullmoon.dance / www.fullmoon.dance

APINAFEST!
Helsinki
Contact: Jarkko Mandelin
http://apinafest.apinaarts.fi
Contemporary dance festival; performances, clubs and panels. In April.

BALTIC CIRCLE FESTIVAL
Helsinki
Contact: Hanna Nyman, managing director
www.balticcircle.com
International contemporary theatre festival & a platform for developing new trends and ideas. In November.

DANCE MONTH FESTIVAL
Pori
Contact: Mikko Lampinen, artistic director
www.pordancecompany.com
International dance festival which has taken place in Pori, Finland since 2007.
and is arranged by Pori Dance Company. In 2017 the festival takes place in November and brings together a wide area of ingenious and expressive artists.

FACTORY FESTIVAL MANIFEST Turku
Contact: Katja Lehmsaari, producer & programme director www.maalialautehus.fi
Annual festival with wide-ranging programme from contemporary dance and new circus to exhibitions. In September.

FULL MOON DANCE FESTIVAL Pyhäjärvi
Contact: tuckantti@fullmoondance.fi
www.fullmoondance.fi
Contemporary dance from Finland and abroad; courses and discussions. In July.

HELSINKI FESTIVAL Helsinki
Contact: Laura Gottlieben, press officer www.helsinki.fi
The largest arts festival in Finland, featuring classical and world music, dance, theatre and urban events. In August.

HELSINKI FLAMENCO FESTIVAL Helsinki
Contact: Helsinki Flamenco Association flamenco@flamenco.fi
The festival brings outstanding flamenco artists from Spain to Helsinki every year. A week full of courses, performances and fiestas. In February.

HURRAA! Helsinki
Contact: katarina.metsalampi@hel.fi www.hurraa.org
A national festival of performing arts for children and young people. In March.

JJYASKYLA FESTIVAL Jyväskylä
Contact: Kyosti Ylikulju, production manager www.jyvaskylankensa.fi
City festival for different art forms: concerts, non-verbal theatre, dance, a children’s programme. In July.

KOKKOLA TALVITANSSIT / WINTER DANCE IN KOKKOLA Kokkola
Contact: Anne Peppo, producer, anne.peppo@kokkolatalvitanssit.fi www.kokkolatalvitanssit.fi
A four-day event, full of contemporary dance and dance theatre. In February.

KUPIO DANCE FESTIVAL Kuopio
Contact: Anna Pitkänen, Festival Director www.kuopiodancefestival.fi
The largest annual dance festival in the Nordic countries. The programme ranges from contemporary dance to classical ballet, folklore, workshops and a varied fringe programme. In June.

LAPPEENRANTA INTERNATIONAL BALLET GALA
Lappeenranta
Contact: Irma Salomaa@loiscdance.com or Juhan Teräväri, artistic director www.lappeenranta.fi/balletgala
A meeting place for Nordic dance and international stars. Contemporary works and classics. In August.

LOIKKA DANCE FILM FESTIVAL Helsinki
Contact: Kati Kallio, artistic director www.loikka.fi
High-quality international dance films, lectures, workshops and events. In April.

LONELY IN THE RAIN? Joensuu
Contact: Eeva Eloranta, executive producer www.itak.fi
Festival for contemporary dance, performance art and improvisation in November.

MOVING IN NOVEMBER Helsinki
Contact: Mikael Aaltonen & Ari Tenhula, artistic directors www.movinginovember.fi
International contemporary dance festival in the Helsinki capital region. In November.

OUDANCE FESTIVAL Oulu
Contact: Helena Lindqvist, managing director www.oujo.fi/festival/
International and local performances in Northern Finland from all genres of dance with a contemporary twist. In September.

PAIKALLISLIUKI Kuopio
Contact: Arta Eljoki, producer www.itak.fi
Platform presenting new productions by local dance artists. In June.

PISPALA SCHOTTISCHE DANCE MANIA Tampere
Contact: info@pissiisi.net www.tanssimania.nuorisoosurat.fi
New folk dance and music, concerts, performances, training. Every two years, next in 28 September – 1 October 2017.

RJUTIAI INTERNATIONAL DANCE FESTIVAL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG AUDIENCES Helsinki
Contact: info@murjaruuth.fi www.burjaruuth.fi
The Ruutia! Festival is a rendez-vous for dance and movement based theatre from Finland and abroad. The festival, founded in 1997, offers high quality performances for children and young audiences as well as workshops, meetings with the artists and public discussions about subjects related to the performances. In April.

SIDE STEP FESTIVAL Helsinki
Contact: Harri Kurelahti, artistic director www.zodiak.fi
Contemporary dance, cutting-edge international performances, lectures, artist dialogues and workshops. Organised by Zodiak – Center for New Dance. In February.

TIME OF DANCE Tampere
Contact: Anna Kumpunen www.tanssivirtaa.net
Festival of contemporary Finnish dance held annually in May.

TAMPERE DANCE CURRENT Tampere
Contact: Anniina Kumpunen www.tampereflamenco.com
International flamenco festival presenting high-quality artists and shows. Also a wide range of workshops. In July.

TAMPERE THEATRE FESTIVAL Tampere
Contact: Hanna Rosendahl, executive director www.tamperinleppa.fi
The programme of Finland’s main international theatre festival includes new drama, modernised classics, dance theatre, contemporary circus and street theatre. In August.

URB – URBAN ART FESTIVAL Helsinki
Contact: Mikael Aaltonen, Kisuma Theatre www.urb.fi
Urban dance and theatre, site-specific performances, visual arts. In August.

Contact: Harri Kuorelahti, artistic director www.zodiak.fi
Kiasma Theatre
Mikael Aaltonen, artistic director
Helsinki
www.urb.fi
LONELY IN THE RAIN?
HURRAA!
www.urb.fi
FESTIVAL FOR CHILDREN AND
CONTACT:
urb@urb.fi
Contact: Laura Gottlieben, press officer
by Zodiak – Center for New Dance. In February.
Premiere 16.11.2017
at Cultural Centre Stoa Turunlinnantie 1, Helsinki
Other performances in November
on 18/19/24/25 and 26th
BROTHERS trio will continue
ALPO AALTOKOSKI’s choreography
Together duet (2010) – with the theme of traveling together. The relationship between humans, the deep meaning of being together, and the pain of detachment. By sharing and surrendering to one’s own, something bigger will come of it.
Tickets 15/12 €
Itako.fi
aaltokoskicompany.fi

TOGETHER duet (2010) – with the theme of traveling together. The relationship between humans, the deep meaning of being together, and the pain of detachment. By sharing and surrendering to one’s own, something bigger will come of it.
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FINNISH DANCE FILM FESTIVAL Helsinki
Contact: Kati Kallio, artistic director www.loikka.fi
High-quality international dance films, lectures, workshops and events. In April.

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Contact: Mikael Aaltonen, Kisuma Theatre www.urb.fi
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World premiere!

**BREATHE – NEW DUET WITH LIVE MUSIC**
Choreographer-dancer Tero Saarinen meets accordion revolutionist, composer-musician Kimmo Pohjonen.
Danse Danse, Montreal, 17–21 April, 2018

**LA PHIL FEAT. TERO SAARINEN COMPANY**
Music direction: LA Phil Principal Guest Conductor Susanna Mälkki
Walt Disney Concert Hall, LA, 19–21 January, 2018

**MORPHED**
Music: Esa-Pekka Salonen / Choreography: Tero Saarinen / Dance: Tero Saarinen Company
Touring in 17/18: Belgrade Dance Festival (Serbia), National Theatre, Zagreb (Croatia), Open Look Festival, St. Petersburg (Russia), Civitacana Dance (It), Royal Festival Hall, London (UK), The Joyce, NYC and 92 Center, Wilkenson (USA), NAC Ottawa and Dance House, Vancouver (Canada), Chatelet, Paris (France)

Also available for touring:
Borrowed Light with The Boston Camerata

...more info...

It’s time to reveal the secrets

oopperabaletti.fi/autumn
Break the Fight!

Breakdance Against School Bullying

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#breakthefight