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Echo Echo Launch The Cove

Nature and performance collide in the latest collaboration between choreographer Steve Batts and climber Dan Shipsides

Updated: 14/09/2012

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By [Lee Henry](#)

'We didn't expect this,' admits Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company artistic director, Steve Batts. 'Initially, it was just supposed to be a jaunt out to the coast.'

Batts is talking about his company's new production, *The Cove*, which he choreographed and co-created with Belfast-

based visual artist and keen climber, Dan Shipsides, who recently had a show entitled *Still Not Out of the Woods* at The MAC in Belfast.

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The Cove grew out of a 2011 residential exploratory project, *Vertical. Nature. Base.*, which saw Batts and Shipsides joined by a collection of dancers and other artists to exchange ideas about nature and performance art in Donegal and Derry~Londonderry.

Batts and Shipsides were so taken with the results of that residential – so taken with the beauty and the impact of the north Irish coastline, with its nooks and crags, its flora and



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fauna, its cliffs and incredible climbs – that they continued to explore similar themes post-project.

The Cove is the manifestation of the two artists' ongoing collaboration, and will tour venues across Northern Ireland throughout October 2012. The production will feature six dancers performing on and around a specially created stage-like structure built to resemble the coastal terrain.

The collaboration between Batts and Shipsides is, perhaps, an unlikely one. It stemmed from an email that Batts sent to Shipsides after Echo Echo received an award of £150,000 from the UK Legacy Trust to develop a three-year dance and sport project. The email read simply: 'Hi Dan, I want you to teach me to climb...'

However, Batts is quick to point out the similarities between contemporary dance and climbing. 'We have much in common,' he explains. 'Both pursuits are extremely physical, obviously. They are both solitary and collective pursuits. I took a lot of what Dan taught me and incorporated it into this new production.'

The Cove is named after the cove at Port-a-Doris in Donegal, which Batts and Shipsides have visited along with the six dancers scheduled to perform in the production. 'We have all experienced the wind there, the views, nature at its wildest and most graceful,' Batts recalls.

The production is scored by emerging Northern Irish composer Christopher Norby, who has worked with the Ulster Orchestra and NI Opera on various productions.

The audience will be sat in the round, surrounding the stage structure, which designed by Shipsides and is, according to Echo Echo marketing officer, Sarah Bryden, 'a piece of art in it's own right' which several curators 'are already interested in inviting it as an installation piece after the tour'.

'It's a very important part of the piece,' adds Batts. 'Each time it is performed in a different venue, the audience will experience the movement of the dancers from different viewpoints and angles. It is supposed to reflect the changing nature of the outdoors – how everything, from the clouds to the light to the time of day, can alter your experience of nature.'

'For me it's part of my psyche that I think I need to be outside,' says Shipsides in the film above. 'To be out doing stuff, and solving problems and climbing. To me it's important, psychologically, and for my sense of what I want to do with my life.'

Batts can see the attraction in climbing, and has grown to love it since first teaming with Shipsides for a jaunt to the north coast. 'There is something life-affirming about climbing heights, and being at the mercy of the nature. I hope that comes across in *The Cove*.'

Visit the [Echo Echo Dance Company website](#) for information on all forthcoming performances of *The Cove*.

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