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Echo Echo Dance Embody The Cove

Posted by [tammymoore](#) on Tuesday, September 18, 2012 · [Leave a Comment](#)

‘People think that dance is the least intellectual art form,’ Steve Batts, co-founder and artistic director of Derry~Londonderry based Echo Echo Dance Company, says. ‘But it is fundamentally intellectual.’

Unlike other artists, after all, a dancer can’t step back and see their art from a spectator’s perspective. They have to think not just about dancing, but about how other people might watch them dance.

That idea – that the dancer has to think, not just move – is behind a lot of the work produced by Batts and Echo Echo Dance Company. ‘It’s not enough to just make the right shapes,’ Batts’ says, ‘You have to understand the grammar of dance.’ It certainly informed the creation of their latest touring production *The Cove*.

Part of Batts continuing collaboration with artist and mountaineer Dan Shippides, *The Cove* is a response to 2011’ *Vertical. Nature. Base .* project. It saw Shippides and Batts climbing and

performing in Donegal's secluded Port a Doris, part of their shared interest in engaging with both natural and human environments. They also invited members of the public to come, climb and respond to the space.

To facilitate that response they carried in and constructed a five metre sq reflective platform, that has seen been relocated to be used as a stage for both *VNB* and *The Cove*. While both productions are collaborations that draw from the same source material, *VNB* was primarily an installation while *The Cove* is more about theatre.

'I wanted to move the process into a more theatrical environment,' Batts explains. 'Installation is where Dan is creatively 'at home', but for me it's performance.'

Batts founded Echo Echo Dance company in 1991, but he'd already been dancing for 11 years by then. He started in 1980, when his younger sister dragged him to her dance class.

'I arrived with a hangover,' Batts remembers, 'and I enjoyed it so much that I looked for other classes as soon as I got back to university.'

He describes dance as 'an antidote' to his studies in Politics, Philosophy and Economics. Such a successful one, in fact, that after graduation it was dance that he pursued as a career.

Working on *The Cove* also gives Batts an opportunity to do further work with the Embodying Landscape process he developed as part of the project. As part of that he took the six dancers involved in *The Cove* back to Port a Doris to 'engage with the space'.

Not just with its beauty though. While it is a beautiful spot – secluded behind a natural archway and north-facing so it has an 'interesting darkness to it' – Batts wants the dancers to focus on the experience of the space.

'People have a tendency to just look at beautiful places,' Batts explains. 'But creativity lies in the details – the touch, taste and sound of a place.'

So he took his dancers swimming, rock-climbing and coastering (which is a little bit of both, you climb rocks and jump into the sea). He wanted them to look at the textures in the rock and the colours in the caves.

'To really activate a memory,' he says. 'All the senses have to be involved.'

The Cove will attempt to recreate the dancers experience at Port a Doris, to actually embody it for the audience in an 'installed experience'. To that end the platform-turned-stage will be set up in the middle of the space, with the audience gathered around on four sides. 'Ideally,' Batts says. 'Some of the venues will only be able to accommodate three sides.'

The point is to create an experience that isn't complete. The choices the audiences make influence the performance they see. If someone picks the right hand side of the stage they might miss things that people on the left will see.

Just like in real life, where if you stop to watch the sunrise on the way down you might miss the seals swimming by.

According to Batts, 'Thinking is a good idea generally.' His work certainly encourages it, for the dancers and audience both.

See The Cove at October 3 at An Grianan Theatre in Letterkenny, October 4 at Strule Arts Centre in Omagh, October 5 at Roe Valley Arts Centre in Limavady, October 10 at Burnavon Theatre in

Cookstown, October 12 in Black Box at Belfast, October 13 at Down Arts Centre in Downpatrick and October 17 at Millennium Forum in Derry-Londonderry.

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