



INTERVIEW WITH **DAVID ZAMBRANO**

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Barcelona in 48 Hours, by Anja Hitzenberger, Edward Ratliff & David Zambrano
Dancers: Mat Voorter and David Zambrano
Photo © Anja Hitzenberger | anja@strudelmedia.com

DAVID ZAMBRANO is dancer, choreographer and teacher. He travels incessantly, dedicating his life to cultural exchanges and to the creative process of dance. David has taught and presented his work in more than 40 countries in Europe, Asia, and in the Americas.

Relâche: How was the Flying-Low Technique originated?

David Zambrano: It did not happen in one day or one moment of my life. This technique was discovered and developed along with my career, through the warm ups before my rehearsals and other classes, and mainly during my teaching. I think that what it took me to discover this work was knee and feet injuries I had around 1982. When I fully pursued dancing, at the age of 21, I used

to do all possible physical activity every day, as running long distance, jumping rope, dancing to the music. I went straight for it, not knowing what warming up or stretching meant. My will power was very strong. After a year of personal hard physical work, I got very bad shin splints, then the middle arches of my feet collapsed, and then a daily bursitis of both knees. I could not walk for six months. But I did not stop moving, dancing, and working out. I just did not do it on my feet, vertically. I went into the floor and continued dancing on a horizontal plane. Rolling from side to side, slowly I began to use my legs again. It was a little bit like a self-healing method when I started it, and I was 22. When I arrived in New York City, in December 1984, and my dance-mates saw me warming up, some of them told me that I looked like I was flying low, and they wanted me to teach them what I was doing. That was how everything started with this world renown technique. So, I got the title of this tech-

nique from my dance-mates. And since I've never liked to fly high, because of fear of being on airplanes, I then thought that "flying-low" was a great term to use.

R: You see improvisation as an art, and choreography as a way of developing improvisation. It seems that the performer's search for spontaneity and invention are the basis of this thought...

David: Yes, they are. It is like training the intelligence of the human body to be able to react rhythmically to any environment where it is exposed. I like to research for different movement repertoires and put them into chapters, and practice them very well in the studio or during live performances. Sometimes I make a set movement choreography based on a specific movement chapter, but many times I use them in my spontaneous performances. And sometimes, during a performance improvisation I touch certain states of mind that are like invisible doors to a fantastic new-old physical chapter. It resembles a scientist's discovery of a new microorganism through the microscope. It is so exciting, but it does not happen every time I perform.

R: You have done cultural exchanges in more than forty countries, presenting your dance and technique. Provided that the performer's body is influenced not only by the dance techniques he or she learned, but also, by the cultural, geographic, and political contexts from their respective countries, how do you perceive the reception of Flying-Low Technique on these different bodies? Is there an intersection point that is independent on culture?

David: It has not been difficult for many dance students worldwide to follow the exercises of Flying-Low. Imitating human body forms is very easy for millions of dancers. We humans are fantastic imitators. Better than monkeys. However, understanding the principles of any technique—not only the Flying-Low Technique—, and being able to associate it with one's every day regular dancing and life is the hardest thing to learn and to teach. Associating "this" with "that" is very difficult for millions of dancers. It is also difficult for many dancers to learn how to use whatever they are learning in life. One of my biggest quests is learning how to use my full life experience in order to help myself and help the others. To become more eloquent with what I already know and to keep open and flexible for the new and fresh experience.

R: It seems that all your body intelligence is related to the

recycling of energy and to the connection "ground-sky". Is there any martial arts influence in this thought?

David: No. I have never studied martial arts. But I love to watch kung-fu movies. What I have learned, I have learned it on the road, teaching and performing to many different cultures and from my favourite teachers, Simone Forti and Joan Skinner. One is here with everything or not, experiencing the "now".

R: You believe that by activating the relation between "centre-joints" we can find the connection that makes possible to shape the body energy into any form of movement. How does this thought relate to the physical concept of spiralling movement?

David: That thought is one of the millions of ways of approaching how to shape one's energy. From my dancing experience, learning to fully use our arms—hands, legs—feet, head—tail to help ourselves—and help the others in case of an emergency—has been crucial in my training. And "spirals" are always there within and outside of ourselves. Even if we do not want to use the concept of spiralling, every part of our body has a spiral form. It is the highway of life. But what happens is that sometimes I can focus my dancing on the concept of spiralling and at other times I cannot.

R: The totality of the body is explicit in your work. And you constantly talk about the integration body—mind, time—space. How do you deal with this totality in your daily routine? I mean, there's a big pressure in the ordinary life that tears apart right and left, front and back...

David: I could say that when I am dancing, teaching or performing, I am experiencing the "now". When I am not dancing, like right now, I am just preparing the future and remembering the past. Teaching and performing dance are like meditating; each is full of life. Daily routine is more difficult.

R: Can you elaborate on speed and transparency?

David: Yes. I use speed in relation to how fast thoughts can travel through the body. How fast we think, or better to say, how fast the human body thinks. It is like exercising the speed of our reflexes.

Transparency is related with depth. We travel through our bodies so, so deeply that we arrive on the other side



Dancer: David Zambrano
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of any given situation. We become transparent, and our thoughts are what light is to air. It is also a way to exercise one's ability to become a media of life (ideas, images, concepts, or many other things).

Communication is basic in my training. We are here for some reason. Things pass through us into this world and vice versa. Like the movie *Matrix*, I also like to think that knowledge is everywhere, but we many times do not have the right technology to grasp it and understand it. Some people get touched by knowledge and they get to understand it and I believe that it is an obligation to pass that knowledge to others. Perhaps to help the others to understand the mystery of life. I like to follow that tradition.

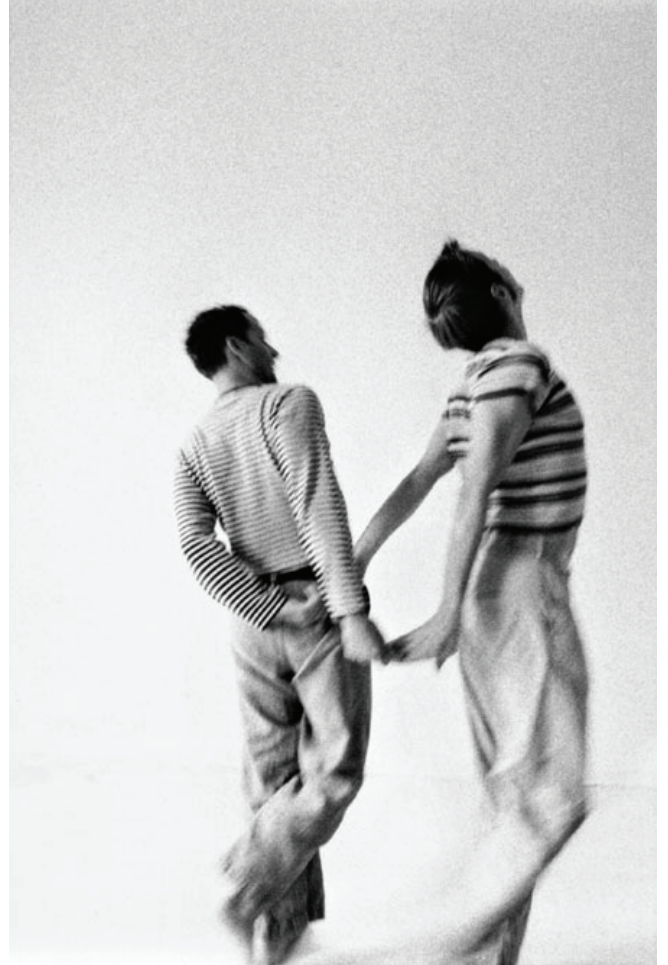
R: There's an introductory statement about one of your works on the web that says: "He has learned from science that cells do not need a protein leader to create life." Can you talk about your "dance web experience" in *The Rabbit Project*? What was it like to work choreographically on the exclusion of leaderships and the autonomy of the dancers?

David: I did not exclude leadership. I leaded the group to learn how to lead. I followed the group to learn how to follow. In the group composition we learned to lead and follow at the same time we were constantly moving throughout the environment. We were simultaneously learning to lead and follow one's full way of thinking in relationship with the whole group during the dancing.

R: This thought of "dance web choreography" clearly appears in some Flying-Low Technique exercises, allowing for the dancers to find the freedom of making full-time choices and of reaching very peculiar levels of attention and presence. Is that also a political contemplation based in your freedom of coming-and-going from one culture to another?

David: Yes, that is one of the reasons. Another reason is the influence of the new technology. Internet. The web-sites, and my four years of computer studies could be other reasons why I do this. But my main reason has been the finding of an instant group composition. I just wanted to have a group of dancers constantly dancing connected with each other—the whole group—and with the environment where the group is dancing.

R: Currently, what has been produced by Venezuelan contemporary dance? Is there a specific focus of interest



Dancers: David Zambrano & Mat Voorter
Photo © Anja Hitzenberger | anja@strudelmedia.com

or any aesthetic singularity among the dance scene groups there?

David: I have not seen the Venezuelan dance scene for more than six years. What I could say from my experience watching Latin, African, and other developing and poor countries dance pieces, is that in general they love drama and politics, and the dance is used to communicate those topics.

R: In *David Zambrano Invita*, in 2000, you invited choreographers and dancers to present a collective improvisation. How did it feel to work in this project? Did the guests have any affinity with your technique or did they come from different schools and dance concepts?

David: We did not do a collective improvisation. I performed with each one of my guests, 30 minutes of spontaneous dancing to live music, and 30 minutes of spontaneous conversing. I had two guests per evening. Some of my guests had affinity with my work and others did not. I selected my guests based on the dance influence we have had on each other's work. My guests were also people I get turned on by dancing with or watching their



David Zambrano in *Barcelona in 48 Hours*. A film by Anja Hitzenberger and Edward Ratliff.
Photo © Anja Hitzenberger | anja@strudelmedia.com

work. They were people whose work I have influenced or vice versa. I made a very simple structure of time. Thirty minutes of total free improvisation with live music, one, two or three musicians, and my guest and I. The group of musicians was also a different one. After the dancing my guest and I would move a table and two chairs. We sat and spontaneously converse without any preparation and for not more than 30 minutes. After my first guest, we had an intermission of 10 or 20 minutes, and after that I did the same thing with my second guest.

R: You were the central theme of the short film *Barcelona in 48 Hours*, directed by the photographer Anja Hitzenberger and by the composer Edward Ratliff. What about your experience in this intermedia production? How was the experience of having your movement captured and transformed in still images and seeing it afterwards as moving images in the final edition?

David: It was a two full days experience in the hot summer of Barcelona in 1998. We had a great time together.

Anja, the photographer and Edward, the music composer, followed me for two days throughout my daily routine. Anja's photos have always been a great inspiration for me. I love to dance for her camera. It was very exciting to see the movie afterwards.

R: Any new creation in process?

David: Yes. Two new projects in mind. A following up of *Proyecto: Conejo / The Rabbit Project* and a following up of *David Zambrano Invites* for very young dancers. Plus a lot of improvisation performances here and there. ♦

David Zambrano led the workshop Flying-Low Technique at Casa Hoffmann – Centro de Estudos do Movimento, in Curitiba, Brazil, November 3–8, 2003.

Born in Venezuela, David Zambrano is dancer, choreographer and teacher. He travels incessantly, dedicating his life to cultural exchanges and to the creative process of dance in every country where he works. David has taught and presented his work in more than forty countries in Europe, Asia, and in the Americas. He was the founder and director of *Festival de Danza Postmoderna*, in Venezuela (1989–1993).



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