

Park Wanderings // (after Alec Finlay after Paul Celan)

Sarah Archdeacon, Director of Corali talks to our Public Engagement Manager Deborah Herring about Corali's new commission and reflections on the experience of working remotely for this commission with Bethan Kendrick, Dancer; Josh Ben-Tovim and Roseanna Anderson, Impermanence - Film Directors; Pam Tait, Designer; Jacobus - Movement Director, Corali Associate Artistic Director; Andy Balcon - Music; Peter Kendrick - Camera and Jenny Kendrick - Stage hand/Dresser.

Park Wanderings // (after Alec Finlay after Paul Celan) is commissioned by Southwark Park Galleries and generously supported by Arts Council England and the Mayor of London.

Deborah Herring: We are excited to launch Corali's new work, *Park Wanderings // (after Alec Finlay after Paul Celan)* this month. This commission is a partnership between Corali, Impermanence and Southwark Park Galleries. It's been a conversation over the past two years and came about as a response to Scottish artist and poet Alec Finlay's Nest box trail, *Questions & Answers (After Paul Celan)* which we unveiled in Southwark Park in 2018. Finlay's work is a permanent sculpture trail of eighteen nestboxes across the gallery's park surroundings, each nest box is emblazoned with poems that refer to the park and also function as a home to the local birds.

Can you tell us more about *Park Wanderings* and what inspired you to make a response to Finlay's nest boxes?

Sarah Archdeacon: Corali was a successful recipient of a strategic fund from Arts Council England (ACE), called

Elevate, set up to forward ACE's Creative Case for Diversity. Corali wanted Southwark Park Galleries (SPG) to be one of the venue partners for our *Elevate* project because of our longstanding creative relationship with the gallery. Alec Finlay's sculpture trail resonated with all of us so much, in so many ways, we really wanted to make a dance piece in response to it. On our visits to SPG, we had all enjoyed the relationship between the gallery and the park, and so Alec's work was perfect. The nest boxes are so poetic, they offered rich starting points from which to create movement. They also had humour and made us laugh, so they were also a lot of fun to work with. Alec's work was a springboard for our own imaginings and we found them very inspiring.

DH: You have been at the head of Corali for over 30 years now. How did Corali begin?

SA: Actually I have only been at the helm for 27 years! I was a volunteer before that. Corali started in a daycentre for people with a learning disability. The centre was on Grange Road, just down the road from SPG. The company was set up by Virginia Moffat, who was a social services worker at the centre. She was asked to do a make-up session on a Thursday afternoon but didn't like make-up, so led a dance session instead. Everyone loved it, so the informal Thursday session grew into a dance company. I was volunteering at the day centre and when the dance company went independent in 1990 I began to co-ordinate it, as Virginia wanted to step away. Just so you know, Corali is anagram of the first company members names.

DH: We have a wonderful history of working together, both in previous commissions and through the Bermondsey Artists' Group, the group of artists (which you, Sarah, were part of) who formed Southwark Park Galleries back in 1984, then known as Café Gallery. Can you talk more about our first official partnership project together which I believe was In 24 Hours (2000) at Bermondsey Tube Station? How did that project develop?

SA: Corali has always been interested in working with visual arts and very early on had begun performing in galleries. We approached SPG (back then Café Gallery) to put on a performance in 1996 and they agreed. The name of that show was Diary of A Dead Artist. Lots of people came and it went really well! That was the start of our great partnership, and it was so exciting to build a crossover audience together.

In the year 2000 we were commissioned by SPG to create a performance to

mark the new millennium. At that time our office was based in the Beormund Centre, not far from the site of Bermondsey Tube. The tube station was yet to open and the glass fronted shop next door to it presented an exciting performance space. Bridget Chew (Corali Associate Artistic Director) and myself managed to persuade Transport for London that a performance in the site would be a good idea, and we were granted permission to put on the show. There was an audience on the inside of the shop, but passers-by also watched from outside, and the action took place both on the inside and outside. It was a fabulous experience that we're still proud of. It is also testimony to the strength of the partnership; because SPG trusted Corali's vision we had the confidence to take the risk and make the work. I remember a friend said to me back then, that they had never heard of such a great partnership, 'maybe in Berlin they said, but never in London!' I knew then how lucky we were to work with the gallery, and how important our work together was. It not only expands our own practice, but also demonstrates to the rest of the art world, and society, the value of diversity in the arts, and the value of partnerships. In 2018 I wrote a [blog post](#) that expresses the energy of our partnership.

DH: As an organisation that champions diversity and equality through dance, what is Corali's current priorities as you look ahead? How do you feel we are addressing diversity as an industry and what more needs to be done?

SA: Now that the UK is beginning to ease out of lockdown we are acutely aware that the pandemic has hit some communities harder than others. People with a disability are one of those groups,

as are individual freelance artists. Our number one priority going forward is to ensure the profile of our dancers within our practice is raised further and they are recognised for their invaluable contribution to culture. Park Wanderings, is a good example of what this might look like. Dancer and choreographer Bethan Kendrick steered the project's direction, enabling the artistic team to open up our creative roles in new ways.

In terms of what we do as an industry, we need to be asking ourselves, and each other, what and how we can do things better. How can we make real and lasting change to break down barriers to promote artists from diverse backgrounds, and create a dynamic relationship with the mainstream.

DH: What has the experience of working remotely been like for the artistic team, under lockdown? Tell us about the filming process, I'm sure you have had to think creatively on how to work together, while apart.

Bethan Kendrick, Dancer: My experience under lockdown has been easy really. It's been different, but still the same in some ways because I have been very busy with Zoom sessions, baking and tidying up. I thought our dining room was a good place to do my filming. It was a good space to be in and I had plenty of room to do lots of moving in my own home.

Before I started my filming I had to have rehearsals with Jacobus on Zoom, to go through the movements for Moorhen, Statues and Rose Garden. We had to get the right details, such as doing each movement in different directions and looking at sizes like big and small, and getting it in the right order. I had to put it

all together with Jacobus, looking at specific details for each film. We went over it a couple of times and that's how I made the process.

I enjoyed my filming but it was long days and was tiring. We had to do my filming at home, but it was good to do it.

Josh Ben-Tovim and Roseanna Anderson, Impermanence - Film

Directors: Communicating online felt very strange at first; creating movements, reflecting on them, sharing notes, creating storyboards... all of this through a screen felt somehow more complicated and formal. We felt a real desire to be in the same room, and to be in a shared space after so long in virtual isolation... but then one day it just clicked. It felt like the new normal, we'd found a new rhythm for collaboration and the exchange of ideas. Through a lot of thinking and hard work, on the first day of filming, it felt like we were all on the same page.

The filming process ran smoothly, Bethan was incredible "on set" and brought so much energy and focus. Film crews have a clear structure where each person has a specific role, allowing a ritual like rhythm to emerge which keeps the cogs turning. We tried to create a very clear set of instructions so that we all knew what was happening on the day. The set up was Bethan as performer, Jenny on props, set and costume and Peter as cameraman who were all together in their front room, and then via Zoom; Pam as production designer, Jacobus as movement director, Sarah checking in to oversee, and we were directing. Josh would check everyone was set before each take and then called "Action" which travelled a sum-total-round-trip of 700 miles into the Kendrick's living room and back. It was an amazing lockdown tonic, a

testimony to patience and passion where lots of discoveries about long distance collaboration were made which we can and will carry forwards with us.

Pam Tait, Designer: A pandemic annihilates reality: suddenly everyone is swept up, tied down and delivered at breakneck speed to the tempest, the cataclysm, utter chaos. Out of a springtime of fear and confusion comes a film. We had time for a chat, a little recce of the locations, a friendly cup of tea.

Working remotely was no problem at first, it's normal in the early stage of the work, there's abundant love and trust about and the ideas are strong and clear. But when the lockdown came, there was no chance to meet Bethan, the performer, no chance to measure her, talk to her, it was all done on guesswork.

The films were made in the sitting room of her house, her parents operated the camera, set and costumes. Without the touch of Bethan I had to rely on a kind of concentrated intuition, to conjure up her body and the things the costume must do for her. This being dance, the costumes had to be comfortable and flexible, fun to wear and move around in. Thanks to the concentration and a great deal of luck the costumes fit, Bethan was happy, the props and backdrops made sense to Bethan's parents. It seems like the project held together. And we filmed.

Jacobus - Movement Director, Corali Associate Artistic Director: As we walked round Southwark Park together, looking at details surrounding the artworks by Alec Finlay, we didn't know this would be the last moment of physical togetherness in this process.

This pre-lockdown site experience helped to connect us together in the subsequent shift to remote lockdown working. I think the gradual building up of the remote "Zoom" process over several sessions was important, as was developing clear roles and visual notes. For the first remote rehearsal, I worked with Bethan to support the creation of movement material from photographs and memories of details seen in the park. The costume design responded to Bethan's initial creative vision, then the costumes themselves helped further generate movement material and ideas. The next movement rehearsal brought more of the team into the remote working process, and for the filming days the Zoom crew grew larger again with the whole team involved. During filming it was sometimes challenging for everyone/anyone involved to know exactly what had been captured on film, watching the live action through another device or screen at a different angle. However, this element of managed unknown meant we were all united by a shared collective imagining, from which emerged some creative, warm and collaborative practice.

Andy Balcon - Music: The prospect of working with Corali whom I'd discovered through my friends in the dance community earlier last year was a very exciting opportunity for me. When receiving the unfinished production, I was compelled to start work right away! And though it took me a few attempts to find my voice in accompanying the pieces, I was very much driven to paint the picture of how both Bethan's movement and vision affected me. The process of writing each piece took me on an interesting journey of experimentation which finally led me back to something I was already familiar with, and though on initial

attempts I found myself pursuing an audio landscape quite far from what I would usually be accustomed to, I felt the journey itself helped uncover my voice in a way that supports the pieces in an honest and genuine way. I think it's very easy to over-complicate things when you don't allow yourself space from the Art you are creating. Due to the circumstances surrounding this period of creation, I did find myself going down the odd rabbit hole, but finally, I do feel as though I arrived at something that reflects the nature of the pieces, and compliments Bethan's work which makes for a fantastic collaboration.

Peter Kendrick - Camera: It was a privilege to be involved, but very challenging to attempt to help with the production of the film as we are simply the parents of Bethan, the Dancer. Not being able to travel, we had to work out with Corali and Impermanence how to use the house we live in with the lighting/ lack of lighting and my Nikon D5600 which I'd never used for video before. When checking on how best to use the video facility, the reviews said, "The D5600 does have video facilities, but if you really need to video use a different camera"! This was all we had, so this is what we used.

A challenging experience, but fun to be involved.

Jenny Kendrick - Stage hand/Dresser: I acted as stagehand, dresser and dogsbody for the project. Using our dining-room and lighting it with daylight and domestic lighting was quite challenging: the space is small and the ambient light level is low. Keeping Bethan's lockdown fringe out of her eyes was challenging too!

We were very keen to do the best we could, and having Josh, Rosie, Jacobus and Pam with us via Zoom made us feel less 'alone' with the filming. We followed their instructions as best we could, and I think our ability to understand and do what was needed improved as we went along.

It was a great pleasure to watch Jacobus working with Bethan to create movement - we haven't been part of the creative process before, so that was very exciting to see. It was also a joy to dress Bethan in Pam's wonderful costumes.

Sarah Archdeacon - Corali Artistic

Director: I emailed Josh, Rosie, Pam and Jacobus two days before lockdown officially began, the email reads 'we CAN do this remotely', meaning make our film together, the one we had planned to shoot on location in Southwark Park. Bethan's enthusiasm for the film, everyone's great ideas, and the wonderful drawings that Pam had already created, inspired me to want to try.

But when I had written 'we CAN', I didn't know anything about the HOW. I'd had a couple of Zoom meetings and suddenly thought anything was possible. With thanks to such a fabulous team, it was. But not without big challenges. What we learnt is that the biggest HOW in 'how' we made the film, was everyone's generosity, artistry and commitment. Now the films are finished, we have started talking about them as 'nuggets of beauty' and they certainly are. A triptych that illuminates what creativity can overcome and offer hope in otherwise such difficult and uncertain times for everyone.

DH: How will the Park Wanderings films live on in Southwark Park?

Josh Ben-Tovim and Roseanna Anderson, Impermanence - Film

Directors: We've wanted to make something in Southwark Park with Corali for a long time. We came to look at Alec Finlay's nest boxes and straight away thought that the work, as well as the idea of a trail was really beautiful. Alec's nest boxes were also made 'after' Paul Celan's poems, and are in themselves a call and response, so it felt like there was a lovely symmetry in using them as a departure point for the films. At one point we were thinking about making the films function in some sort of augmented reality, where you could follow the action through the park on your phone, but in the end we wanted something that was much more immediate in its production, as well as Lo-Fi in its digital / physical existence and interface. There is something understated about the nest boxes, which lets the poetry and the idea sing through, and we wanted to reflect this as well as the feeling of each poem.

Our films will be uploaded to the internet, and QR codes will be printed and sit throughout the park. You will then be able to very simply scan these codes on a phone and instantly be taken to the films, so you can watch them as you stand there in the park. It's nice also to think that this could be an accumulative installation which we add to over time. We've been collaborating with Corali for a number of years now and it would be lovely to have this project, in this place, with this source of inspiration, as something which we can return to over the coming years, working our way through the 20 nest boxes, slowly filling the park with dance.