



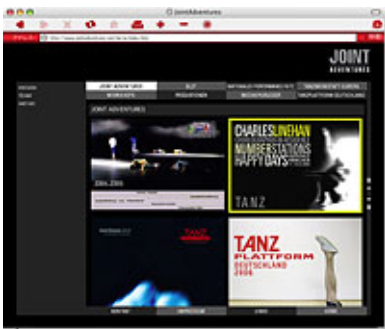
Profile

Mr. Walter Heun

Born in 1962, is living and working in Munich. Between 1985 and 1989 Walter Heun was Director of Tanztage Munchen, Dance Energy, and Tanztendenz Munchen. In 1990 he initiated and centrally coordinated the nation wide festival BRDance, is co-founder and presenter of Tanzplattform Deutschland (Dance Platform Germany) since 1994, and he founded and still is Director of Tanzwerkstatt Europa in Munich. He organized the Swiss Contemporary Dance platform in 2000.

He has been dedicated to the performing arts since 1987 as initiator, member and artistic director of several international institutions and networks of contemporary dance such as European Network for the Research of Contemporary Dance Production and the Dance Network Europe (1994-2000). In 1990 he founded his own production firm called Joint Adventures. In 1991 he founded Nationales Performance Netz (NPN), he conceived and directed Luzerntanz - choreographic centre at the Luzernertheater, Lucerne (CH).

<http://www.jointadventures.net>



Presenter Interview プレゼンターインタビュー

Working to build an infrastructure for contemporary dance in Germany Speaking with the founder of Tanzplattform Deutschland

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ドイツのコンテンポラリーダンスのインフラ整備に尽力
タンツプラットフォームの創設者に聞く

Since the earliest days of German contemporary dance in 1980s, Walter Heun has been working from his base in Munich, beginning as the director of Tanztendenz Munchen and later initiated and coordinated the nationwide festival BRDance. He is also founder and leader of Tanzplattform Deutschland market and festival and serves as an important presenter of contemporary dance as leader of the production company Joint Adventures. In this interview, Mr. Heun speaks about building infrastructure for dance community in Germany.

(Interviewer: Akiko Tachiki)

While your speech at the symposium of the Dance Triennale Tokyo, it was quite interesting when you introduced yourself as an artist's first friend, a producer, a festival director, a communicator and also an educator. You have been in charge of various type of job in the dance field. Could you tell us about your career from your first encounter of dance?

When I was a schoolboy, I was already interested in the jazz dance classes that the girls had at our school. But the boys were not allowed to participate. After school, we got together a group of ten boys and rehearsed two dance pieces to perform to an audience of 800 people and it was a big success. After my time in the military, I looked for a dance studio and began taking classes. At that time I studied theater at university because they had seminars on film—originally, I was much more interested in film, not dance—but then I began taking seminars on dance as well. I finished my studies at university on the topic of dance. I wrote a thesis on the Elizabeth Duncan School, which was the first education center for contemporary dance that existed.

In the mid 1980s when you started your career in dance, it was a dramatic period in German contemporary dance. Historically speaking, European contemporary dance was rising, and the German modern dance era was cut off at the end the 80s.

Yes. I did feel it was the end of the German modern dance such as Tanztheater. Even though there are still very good productions that come from German Tanztheater, I feel that as an art form the German Tanztheater had come to a kind of climax at the end of the 80s. There were some new artists who started doing some very unusual things at the time. I was involved with the development of these new forms. I got a job as a dance producer or promoter by sitting at a bar with some dancers who were complaining and I got a piece of paper and wrote down what became a several pages concept for the city of Munich. So we founded a group with a collective of five or six choreographers, and one of the leading figures of DANCE ENERGY was Micha Purucker. I was the manager of it.

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That's how you started getting commissions from the city of Munich and building the dance community there. What was the policy of Munich city in those days?

In 1985 the situation in Munich was that they gave a subsidy for dance only about 18,000 euros in total and there were two companies then—each got a subsidy of 9,000 euros, which is ridiculous. The city came to them and said “There is this money, please come up with an idea of what you can do with it.” So the companies started working together and they said let's create a festival of only local productions. We participated as a company in the organization, and Micha Purucker of Dance Energy was one of the leading figures of this four-week festival. All of our shows were sold out, but we only got one review in the newspapers. The next year I proposed to the dance community that I would take over the organizational execution of the festival. We strengthened it a bit, gave it a bit more quality, and cut out a few presentations. And it was only three weeks but we got a lot more press coverage and a sponsor for it. This was the first step for collaboration within the local dance community. By selling out these shows all the time, we had the advantage of going to the city and saying, “We can do much better work if we are collaborating continuously. Give us a space and we will found an organization where all the companies collaborate, and we will of course need a little more funding.”

As a result of it, in 1987 we raised the public funding for dance by a factor of 10, and we also obtained a 1,000 square meter studio space where all the local companies could produce. It still exists—it's called TANZTENDENZ MÜNCHEN, and I was the managing director for six years.

This was really a new development, wasn't it?

Yes. The idea was “collaboration,” then we get together and go to the politicians and say, “We can do even better if you give us more money, if we get the facilities to collaborate...” It's not only the artistic collective idea but also the practical ones. I looked at the needs that emerged from the artists, and then I looked to the possibilities of the policy and the funding system. So I tried to bring both together by applying some pressure to get it done.

Why Munich? Is that because you live there?

I have been living in Munich since 1972, actually it could have been any other city. But Munich is both a lively place and my local. I was lucky because there was a person in the city's cultural office who had an interest in dance, so she helped us establish the community, and find political majorities for what we needed.

Tel us about your job at the Tanztendenz Munchen?

The organization Tanztendenz Munchen is not just a production house for local companies. My job as director was also to organize tours for the five choreographers who were sharing this center. At that time I recognized that if there's no one interested in inviting companies from Germany, I had to come at it from a different angle. What I did in 1989, after running Tanztendenz Munchen for two years, was that I organized the local festival TANZTAGE Munich festival again at the Gasteig, a big 600-seat cultural center in Munich. It was all productions that had already been shown in Munich—there was only one premiere and we sold out every night. This was quite impressive for the city. Then we decided what we did locally, we would now do on a national level. This was the festival of BRDance, 1990. It was a play on words— Bundes Republic Deutschland (BRDance), meaning Federal Republic of Germany (laughs). It happened to be the first time

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ever since the Second World War that contemporary German dance was seen all over Germany. I traveled for a year across Germany to prepare for the event, and met all the producers. I convinced them to meet in Frankfurt, and I got 19 of them to participate in the festival. We were 19 co-presenters in 15 cities. We did 120 showcases in 15 cities, only with contemporary dance. What we provided was central coordination and finding a sponsor. We raised funding to pay for all the posters, brochures, etc. We produced a publication solely about contemporary dance in Germany in 1990. I initiated this as managing director of Tanztendenz Munchen, and then I founded a new company called Joint Adventures. The BRDance festival was my first project with Joint Adventures.

Who participated to the BRDance festival as contemporary dancers?

To name a few of the companies which we had invited, you might know the Dance Company Rubato (directed by Dieter Baumann), Tanzfabrik Berlin (the most established collective/company in Berlin at that time – today it's more a studio and a production house), Susanne Linke was part of it. I did one of the last presentations of Gerhard Bohner in the festival... it was almost like a historical moment because there were all these American and Canadian presenters coming to see him.

When we had this nationwide presentation, it was the first time the ministry people realized there was something like a contemporary dance scene, which they did not know before. You don't know how many times I went to an office at a funding body explaining to them what contemporary dance is. I was not just fighting for the artists I wanted to work with, but it was more like explaining the art form—defining it for the bureaucrats. At that time, I went to the Ministry of Education and convinced them to give us money, to organize a symposium on contemporary dance education. I connected it with the symposium part of the festival and managed to get the state Secretary of Education—who is now the head of the German parliament, Dr. Lammert, a very important politician—to come to the opening of the event. We were always using our projects to attract a bigger audience. We found a way to collaborate with people to make it bigger, more important, and at the same time, we used the energy that came from the event to put pressure on the bureaucrats.

What was the symposium about?

It was an international symposium on dance education. The idea behind it was because we only had ballet academies at the time and the only contemporary dance school at the time was Folkwang (Essen), but the rest of the dance community felt that it was a breeding ground for the Pina Bausch—like it didn't serve for anything else. The symposium was very important in providing vital information. We released the first booklet on dance companies, which was financed by the Ministry of Education as a part of the symposium. We were able to say that there was a dance community and in this city we had this company, and this company, and here were the addresses, and then we would have five pages of people who were professionally involved with dance. These were the documents to create public recognition of the existence of dance, and to show the fact that there a living community and we need to support this art-form. This was one of the most striking arguments when we began our movement—that there was an art-form that exists in Germany that gets no funding at all from the public sector.

So you were successful in seducing the officials...

Seducing and oppressing (laugh). In the beginning it had a strong political impact—critics wrote that it was a fantastic festival, it had to go on—but you cannot

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have a festival as a celebration, with the same people every year. The idea was to do the first festival to show what's there, and present a funding scheme that would make it clear for the sponsor to see what we need, and then we would have to continue with the funding scheme. It had to be interesting to them to have a major event in the opening, and then continue with a funding scheme that reflects what they're doing in their business.

Through these activities, we established the National Performance Nez in Germany (NPN) in 1999 with six German dance organizers to create and adapt a long-term supportive structure for contemporary dance. The idea of the NPN is always to stimulate the collaboration between the artists and the promoters and producers. The money we give out is always to the presenter who invites a company, but we ask them to provide a certain minimum pay for the dancers in order to raise the social status of the dancers. So we force the presenter to give more money to the artists, but by subsidizing them, it's less expensive for the presenter. So both—the presenter and the artist—are winners, but only if the artist is properly compensated. That's the basic model. With the co-production grant, we make it so that you need two co-production partners within Germany in different federal states, and you need a third partner from outside the country. We don't mind if the choreographer comes from Germany or elsewhere on this planet—it's just important that the essential part of the production is made in Germany. And the applicants have to come from Germany as well.

There are many public theaters in Germany. How do you work with them as the director of NPN?

We have something like 300 state- and civic-theaters. It's quite a huge number, and the number is growing these days. We are lucky that there are almost 80 fully-subsidized, fully-paid companies at state- and civic-theaters all over Germany. Originally there were only ballet companies, then there were a few contemporary companies like Pina Bausch or William Forsythe. The funny thing about these companies is that they produced for a local audience, but there wasn't any exchange between them. Most of the dance that you know now from Germany has been produced on the independent scene. But the independent scene was funded with a lot less money. In the independent scene there was a smaller audience, but much more artistic freedom. By collaborating in this independent community with international festivals and production houses, these created a much stronger mobility, a lot more exchange between Germany and the international festival circuit. In this way, the whole independent scene became a sort of counter-power in regards to the established theaters. Since one or two years ago, there's much stronger solidarity between the two worlds of dance because the established theaters realize that they're in danger if they don't socialize with the independent scene. It's hard to get that distinction if you don't have that theater system in your country. That's the reason I say the system is a great help, it helps artists do their work, but at the same time it's a burden for artistic development, because established theaters haven't been opening up, they didn't provide for experimental work because the audience hasn't been interested.

Germany has a federal republic, the state, the province, the city and the regions—four layers of funding. The states play an important role on the national cultural policy, doesn't it?

In the German legislation, the federal states are most responsible for the arts. We have a funny paragraph in our constitution that says that the sovereignty of the arts lies with the federal states. We are fighting this like crazy because we want to have

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a change in the constitution so that the state of Germany also becomes responsible for the funding of arts. From our experience in history with the Nazi government, where all activities were streamlined for propaganda, especially culture, we inherited the constitution from the British system which gave sovereignty of culture to the federal states in order to avoid streamlining of cultural expression by a dictator or by the federal government. It's a good thing, but it's also complicated to work with this system because all the federal states are competitive, and there is little coordination and no real communication. There is a steady conference of the Ministers of Culture, but every federal state has the right to a veto, and we have 16 of them, so it's really hard to get a decision. Most of the funding for the production, by the way, comes from the cities. However, the NPN is a very good example of how the federal states can collaborate in cultural funding.

You also have been responsible for Dance Platform in Germany.

The first Dance Platform was five days in Berlin in 1994. We presented 25 companies as a collaboration of the three cities, Berlin, Frankfurt and Munich, and we had about 130 promoters coming from all over the world. It was a huge success. At that time the Platform undertook a role of the selection for the Bagnolet platform, and the biggest platform in the world. We decided to have Dance Platform every two years in different cities.

In Frankfurt in 1996 we made it a bit tighter—it was three days with 15 companies, a good format. By the time it came to Munich in 1998, we had seven venues we could work with. We did some site-specific work—we showed Lynda Gaudreau in the main hall of the university in Munich and Felix Ruckert in a construction site. We had a 600-seat theater, a 1,200-seat theater that opened meanwhile, and we had several theaters with 150 seats. In the end we presented 15 shows in 7 theaters, and it was a really big event. We had 350 producers coming from all over the world to see it. Within four years' time, we'd begun from a small thing, and suddenly it was eventually a far bigger event than Bagnolet.

Originally we had a plan for three cities, Berlin, Frankfurt and Munich. We didn't think further. But when it was in Frankfurt, we already had the first colleagues coming up and saying "Hey, what will happen when Munich is over?" The next one to apply was Kampnagel in Hamburg. They were close colleagues of ours so they asked if they could do the next one after Munich. We said OK if you prove that you can do the fundraising, and you have the venues. They found it was a successful project, and we raised some funding with the Ministry of the Interior at the time, too. Now it's getting bigger and bigger. For Leipzig in 2002 we were already such a big group. In the first years of the festival, the co-organizers [Nele Hertling, Dieter Buroch and me] were also responsible for programming; however, since the Düsseldorf Dance Platform in 2004, the decision-making has been placed in the hands of a board of advisors which consists of dance professionals, who were in turn elected by the co-organizers.

What are your future thoughts regarding the platforms?

Dance Platform will be transformed by the artists themselves, and as the world will change. We will decide about the next one after 2010, and maybe we will do it in Frankfurt again...but we don't know yet.

Are there any other projects you have been involved in the German dance scene?

Did you hear about Tanzplan Deutschland? The Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) is now giving 12.5 million Euros over a period of five years until 2010 in order to stimulate contemporary dance. Their original idea was

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transforming Dance Platform into a national dance festival, so we opposed that and proposed a new idea. I was lucky to be on the consultancy board for the National Culture Foundation. We told them we have the idea of federalism already in Germany, so why don't you create a system where you use the strength of federalism, but use your national money in order to create a competition between the federal states so that the states put more money into dance. This was our original idea. But they decided to go for a National dance Festival. Then they began advertising the position of artistic director for a dance festival they would do on their own. There were quite some people interviewed for the job of being artistic director of it. Then it was Madeline Ritter who kind of neglected the job description and proposed something completely different that went more towards what we thought was right. It's funny this wasn't a common plan, but somehow in the end they did the right thing! Tanzplan Deutschland supports and internet platform, the co-production funds of the NPN, and some other activities of national recognition. It's biggest budgets are allocated towards 8 cities whose dance institutions teamed up for activities that would strengthen the recognition of dance over a five year's period and would make a substantial change for the establishment of dance in that respective city.

Is there any state you can point out as being the most energetic in Germany in terms of dance?

It's clearly Berlin. For a while, you could say there were two directions, mainly coming from Berlin. One is what people call conceptual dance. Like Xavier Le Roy, Thomas Lehmen, Alice Chauchat. Jochen Roller, Martin Nachbar, and others. The other one I would call the "new German dance comedy" (laughs) like Constanza Macras we've seen yesterday. It's a development from Berlin like Sasha Waltz—some people who work with her do kind of similar things as she did before. It's of course a fun term for it. I think there is a new way of doing German Dance Theatre in a fresher way and in a more juvenile style, and with a kind of Berlin trashy charm. One of them is Constanza Macras, another is Two Fish, but the one who kind of invented it was Sasha Waltz in 1984.

I also think that internationally there is a serious development of artists who work more toward the fine arts. If you look at Lynda Gaudreau, Neuer Tanz, Christina Ciupke in a way, when she did the program with the photographers. And then there are also some artists who are really reflecting the art of choreography again, but from a different angle—Jonathan Burrows, for example, or Rosemary Butcher. I think Munich has the second biggest dance community. If you think about dance as a dance community, Hamburg is also strong. If you think of dance as venues or famous artists, of course Frankfurt used to be big with William Forsythe, the Mousonturm. They do a lot of international programs. I would say Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Munich, Frankfurt are all the leading cities. Then we have a choreographic center in Essen. There is a collaboration between the city of Frankfurt and the city of Dresden in order to support William Forsythe.

Perhaps foreign artists enjoy a privilege working there with equal status. So how about multiculturalism as the national policy?

I would say that almost every German funding system, whether it's a city or a federal state or a national state, they don't mind where the artists come from. But it's important that they live in Germany and that they are working there. In most funding schemes there is a regulation saying that your life and artistic work has to be in the city—that most of the time and energy you spend has to be in that place. Of course if a choreographer is successful, they spend 2/3 of their time abroad, so

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it's difficult to make that distinction, but it was never difficult for foreign artists to apply for funding. I'm really happy that it is like this in our country.

In Munich they have a regulation that the city funding can only go to an artist who has been doing one production of reference at his own cost, so you cannot just pass by, take the money and run. You have to make one production to prove that you have a serious interest in staying in Munich. But it's really quite open. For example, working with Rosemary Butcher, we had a scheme called choreographer in residence, and the funding for this went into the new project. With our choreographer in residence program, we were always inviting one international artist to produce in Munich with the integration of artists from Munich. For example, Butcher did a piece with two dancers from Munich and one dancer from Italy and she produced a piece called "White." It toured successfully in Europe, and we found international co-producers, but the main funding came from Munich.

Joint Adventures as a production unit tries to help choreographers establish their work in Munich. I had been collaborating with Mia Lawrence since some years ago. She did a production in our festival, so she had the right to apply. But then we don't follow them up for good—they have to follow their own structure.

So Germany still attracts many artists from abroad.

There's a fantastic system. If you want to work as a choreographer in a civic theater the companies have something between 450,000 to five million Euros a year. The state ballet has something like 60 fully-employed dancers. The biggest opera company of a single opera house is Düsseldorf with 80 dancers, fully employed and there should be some foreign artists in the company. That's quite something.

Can you give us your perspective on the role of festivals in the future?

Festivals should not be just a celebration. You need the celebration aspect in order to make it work—it has to be fun for an audience to be there. You cannot program things that an audience won't accept. When I think about a festival I think about creating a dramaturgy for an event.

It can be many different things. It depends on where you are and what you do.

When I worked at the opera house in Lucerne, we had a 500-seat theater in a 50,000 inhabitant city. It's the main theater in that city, and the audience had 30 years of ballet tradition to see there. You cannot go there and only present Jerome Bel, for example. When I programmed there, I started with relatively established names like Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Wim Vandekeybus, O Vertigo. I showed them a range of work. We also presented choreographers like Boris Charmatz who worked with music by Otomo Yoshihide with a sound level of 105 decibel in this opera house. The administrative director asked somebody in from sound control and we had to turn it down because it was physically aggressive. But the audience could stand it. I think you can do that if you take your audience by the hand. I gave a few hints on what they should look for, rather than explain what they were seeing there. After each show we had a public discussion like, "Are there any questions?" But after half a year it was a really lively discussion.

I am working on a new collaborative project now with a few partner organizations in Munich called access to dance. In this new project, we are also thinking of creating a focus on a certain dance community somewhere. In April we are planning an event in Munich and some other Bavarian cities where we would present Swiss dance for three or five productions, and create a focus on Swiss dance. Maybe we will do that with Dutch dance one day, but we'll see—there could also be a possibility to do Japanese dance, if we find a common ground.