



Member Profile



Elizabeth Cameron Dalman

When did you start dancing?

At the age of four I went to Nora Stewart's dance school in Adelaide, South Australia. With her I studied classical ballet (the Russian style) and Margaret Morris dance technique until my late teens. In my early twenties I traveled to London to further my studies in classical ballet. But there, I saw a performance of American dance pioneer José Limón. This performance was the catalyst for the change of direction in my dance career. I then searched for teachers of these American modern dance techniques which were hard to find at the time. At the Folkwangschule in Germany, then directed by Kurt Jooss, I met African American dancer/choreographer, Eleo Pomare. Eleo had studied with José Limón as well as other American modern dance pioneers.



I soon moved with him from Germany to Holland where he established his European Modern Dance Company. As a member of this company for three years I concentrated on the modern dance techniques, changing my focus from classical ballet to these new, avant-garde philosophies. I returned to Australia in 1963, and in 1965 founded Australian Dance Theatre, which was the first professional contemporary dance company in the country. As Artistic Director of ADT for ten years, I helped pioneer the modern dance techniques and philosophies both in Australia and to other countries that we visited.

As well as regular tours around Australia, in 1968 we toured to Europe and New York, in 1971 to Papua New Guinea, India and South East Asia, and in 1972 to New Zealand.

In the 1980's I lived in a small hills town in northern Italy. I taught dance in the nearby town and set up a youth dance-theatre company. I continued my professional career, often as a guest artist with Danskern, a modern dance repertory company in Holland.

When I returned to Australia, I moved to New South Wales. In 1990 I founded Mirramu Creative Arts Centre, on the shores of Lake George/Weereewa. Mirramu Creative Arts Centre nurtures artists of all disciplines and from around the world. It also offers performance opportunities for artists in various festivals and Mirramu activities.

In the year 2000, I founded Mirramu Dance Company, which is a contemporary dance company working in inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural contexts. We perform regularly in traditional theatres but as many of our works are inspired by nature and environmental issues, we often present them in site-specific places.

What do you love about dancing?

What I love about dancing is that I learn about myself, and about the world around me. It makes me feel alive.

What do you love about teaching /sharing dance?

I have had some wonderful teachers in my life, who have taught me not only about dance and dancing, but also about living. I therefore love to teach dance and pass on the knowledge I have learned from

these mentors and from my own life experiences and dance career.

Teaching dance is the best teacher you can have, because you have to fully understand and experience what you are teaching about before you can pass this knowledge on. In so doing you also discover new things about your own dance and performance. I also learn so much about communicating with others when I teach dance and I find it very rewarding to see how others not only enjoy dancing but also grow and discover things about themselves through dancing.

What is your favourite dance style and why?

My favourite style is contemporary dance. However contemporary dance includes such a wide variety of styles, forms and expressions that it depends on which style within the contemporary dance medium we are looking at.

My favourite dance styles to learn and perform are those contemporary dance styles that have their roots in the pioneer modern dance styles of Martha Graham, Lester Horton, Doris Humphrey and José Limón. This is because I was trained in these techniques and through them I have been able to sustain a life-long career in dance. I believe that they offer a strong basis for dancing in any style and through utilizing the philosophies behind these techniques one can find enormous possibilities for creative expansion and experimentation.

I also love improvisation, which I often use in my creative process and I believe it is essential for all dancers to do. I am interested in Bhutoh dance because the movement initiates from emotional sources, and is practiced in an improvisational way. I have also trained in Mobius Kiryuhō, a Japanese Art of Flowing movement, which has given me a much deeper understanding of moving “from the inside out”. Another favorite dance style for me is African dance. This is not only enjoyable to do, it also teaches much about connecting to the ground and about the rhythmical nature and possibilities in movement.

In watching dance, I enjoy and most appreciate those styles that communicate something about our humanity and our lives. I do not just want to watch dance as a spectacle. I want to feel something from the performer/performers. And in this light it does not matter what style of dance it is.

Have you faced any challenges during your dance career so far?

Yes. I have faced many challenges in my long career. These include artistic challenges and also administrative and managerial challenges.

Whenever I choreograph I face challenges, not only in the studio with the dancers, but also within myself. I am at present working on a choreography with eight Taiwanese dancers here in Taipei. It is a commissioned work called Voices from Chernobyl. It is a difficult subject about the victims and survivors of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. I had to find ways of putting some ideas and images of this terrible tragedy into movement. On top of that I am working in a cross-cultural context and this poses its own challenges. But, with the dancers, I am working through all these challenges!

Back in Australia, with Mirramu Dance Company, I am also working on the Morning Star project, which is a cross-cultural collaboration with dancers, musicians and song-men from Yirrkala in Arnhem Land. It is an exciting and stimulating work, with its own challenges that are pushing us all culturally and artistically.

What do you find inspiring?

I find the natural world always a source of inspiration, and I love to travel and meet with people from different places and cultures. Life itself is inspiring.

What have you been most proud of in your dance career so far?

I am proud of many things in my dance career. These include the founding of Australian Dance Theatre, Mirramu Creative Arts Centre and Mirramu Dance Company, and leading the Dance Course at the University of Western Sydney from 2004 to the end of 2006. There are many dance projects I am also proud of, including the small intimate projects as well as the large ones. More recent, and no doubt closer to my heart is the Sapling to Silver production, which Mirramu Dance Company presented in the Street Theatre last year. I am proud of this one.

What are your plans for this year? The next few years?

My plans for this year include presenting this new work Voices from Chernobyl with Taiwanese dancers and Miranda Wheen from Mirramu Dance Company, at the Tsai Jui Yueh International Dance Festival in Taipei on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th November. I will also be performing in this festival. At the end of November Hsiao-yin Peng and her group, Dancecology, from Taiwan will be resident at Mirramu Creative Arts Centre for three weeks. They will be performing near Hall on December and at Mirramu's Summer Solstice celebrations on December.

Next year is an extremely busy year with further development on the Morning Star project with Mirramu Dance Company in February with presentations at the National Gallery of Australia on 1st, 2nd, 3rd March. From the 14th - 24th March 2013, Mirramu Creative Arts Centre will be host to an International residential Dance Course. This will culminate in a Festival on the 24th March with performers from within the Dance Course and from the ACT and local Bungendore regions.

My long association with the dance community here in Taiwan ensures that there will be further trips back here to this beautiful island for me, both for further teaching and choreographic projects. I also have planned some dance-focussed trips to Europe and the United States in the future.

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