



Fling

physical theatre

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artistic director



This might sound a bit egotistical but *Fling* really started out of my need to have a professional choreographic life, even though I was living in a little country region.

I came up from Melbourne to Bega for a holiday and then I just couldn't get myself back to the city. So I started applying for projects and made a bit of a place here and then I met a partner. So then that was that. Here I am.

I started *Fling*, a youth dance company, about seven years ago. We have up to 20 young people each year who are company members and together with other choreographers and musicians we create original performances. We meet three times a week and basically have one main season a year with a season of ten performances. Last season, we had 1,500 people come to see the show which is just enormous, particularly for contemporary dance. We don't have a performing arts centre in this area. Nothing like it. When we perform we more or less have to build the theatre which is no mean feat.

The kids come with different backgrounds, sometimes in soccer or gymnastics or martial arts. The boys who've played soccer, they're very successful at *Fling*. We've had three boys from Bega enrolling in the School of Dance at the VCA this year. This is one of the most prestigious dance

schools in the country. There are eight ex-flingers studying circus and dance at tertiary level now and from a little area like this, that's fantastic. I'm a bit of a gold digger where dancers are concerned. I mean, I haven't created these dancers but *Fling* has definitely given them an opportunity.

We've been lucky enough to have had funding from the Regional Arts Fund to run a residency program and we have visiting artists come in for anything from a weekend to a couple of weeks and bring their skills and help create the show. For the last two years, we've been able to tour. Last year we toured the 2006 show to the Parramatta Riverside Theatres and Wollongong's Merrigong Theatre and we've been asked back again.

If I had a wish it would be for a permanent home for us. We train and rehearse at the Bega Town Hall which can get very cold and has floors that are a bit more slippery than I'd really like. It's a beautiful space but it's a community space and that makes a difference. You come in and there's that feeling of other people having been there, people who might not be as respectful of a space as artists are. Dancers are naturally so clean. We really like a clean, open space. Just being able to walk in and have your own images on the walls and being able to leave your equipment out and so on, that would be such a luxury. When I remember the spaces that I used to dance in: heated tarket flooring, a sound system or a live pianist, all those things. I just think these kids are working so well under what are really difficult conditions.

Fling is incorporated now. I didn't really want to do it at first because I was fearful of the whole administration thing – there's just one of me and I don't stretch far enough. But Jen Hunt who's our Regional Arts Officer, she assured me that it was the right way to go and that I would get support. And with Jen's guidance, it has all fallen in place. Now we've got a board and a bank account and we have some fantastic board members. One is a lawyer, a fabulous lawyer whose son was at *Fling*. And there's another bloke who originally rang and gave an anonymous donation and we found out who he was (so much for anonymity!) and approached him and now he's the treasurer. And we have Gordon Beattie as our chairperson. He taught Performing Arts at Nepean University and he's got such knowledge of the industry and the contacts and the funding bodies.

For a while I've been running a junior program for kids not old enough to be in the main company and I've had trainee tutors (senior members of *Fling*) come in to help me. And now this year for the first time, one of our flingers who is 22 now and has been in the company since our first show, she's joining us part-time. It's a big step for her and for us but we're all excited about it.

There's something about working with youth in terms of their enthusiasm and sheer energy levels. It's very satisfying. At times, like anybody, I do sometimes wish I could go off and do this and do that. And I do miss adult company creatively at times but what you get back from young people is a totally different thing. Young people are more openly affectionate about what they're receiving – you can feel what they think.

Just today, I've been ringing around the schools in the area asking if I could come in and give workshop information about our next project. And the schools are really jumping at the opportunity. When I first came here I would have been lucky to talk to anybody who knew about me or *Fling*. Yes, the attitude has changed hugely. No one was jumping then!



ABOVE:
Dragonfly, Dictionary of Habitats
PHOTO: KATE SMITH

INSET:
Sol's Way
PHOTO: PAUL HOPPER