

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

David Wynen has appeared extensively in theatre and television and his training has included all facets of dance, drama and voice. He is currently dance/movement lecturer at the University of Ballarat. His specific research interests are centred on tap, and dance as a form of rehabilitation.

How do you respond to a dance commission when the choices are driven by limited resources and the brief from a client? For a start, a piece driven by creative rather than commercial forces is likely to have a different process and a different outcome. There are times when a commissioned choreographer may accept work out of financial need rather than creative interest and have to accept that a blank canvas is different to one with a pre-existing template. This is what I had to face when I received a brief to create a *Bollywood* style piece for a Commonwealth Games event in Ballarat; I had the template, but I knew little about it.

As a choreographer, where should I start? At the beginning? In the middle? Or where I find the first response to the story or the music? Do works only happen in a linear fashion? This would assume a beginning and an end, and a plot that can be followed. Are they divided into sections? Or can choreographers merely join together disparate steps? Do they work on each motif or narrative section and then move onto the next? There were many issues I had to consider.

Prior to undertaking this commission the work practices I instinctively used were parallel to those utilised by many other dance makers. I had learnt to choreograph through watching and working with others, not consciously choosing to work in any fashion other than the one I was shown. The search for knowledge to formulate *Bollywood Meets Tap* created an artistic tension between the knowledge I had previously inherently used when choreographing and the knowledge I had to search for and acquire to create this piece.

The commission came with varied constraints, as is often the case with commercial work, including: the duration of the finished work; the amount of rehearsal time available due to the voluntary nature of the performers; the overall tight timeframe in which the piece needed to be completed; and, a small budget to cover, wages, workshop expenses and the hire or making of costumes. An initial briefing by the Ballarat City Council and the Commonwealth

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

Games Live Site representatives was followed by guidelines that were set out for the production. The brief outlined that the piece was to run for 20 minutes and be suitable for a broad audience. The production needed to encompass tap and Indian dancing, plus music evoking *Bollywood* and its style – an unusual and disparate combination of dance styles.

Final agreement on the terms of the piece did not occur till mid-December and the students were to participate in eight to ten part-time days of rehearsal in late February for performances scheduled for mid-March. I had six weeks beforehand to acquire what information I could to formulate a concept for *Bollywood Meets Tap* and have it ready for the rehearsal stage of the process. This is an account of how I dealt with this commission, how I worked within its constraints and resolved some of the challenges I encountered.

To begin, it was essential to decide what *Bollywood* meant to me and how much further my knowledge could be broadened through research, given the limited creative development period available. My specialisation is in Broadway/Musical Theatre tap, a style originally formulated by the likes of Astaire and Kelly. This style was developed for the stage and then taken to the screen utilising more of a ballroom look and ballet training. It is the most common style in mainstream American culture with the best examples of this in Broadway musicals like *42nd Street*ⁱ. In recent years I have worked with American rhythm tap practitioners, such as Brenda Bufalinoⁱⁱ, Jason Samuels-Smith and Josh Hilbermanⁱⁱⁱ. Such rhythmic tap dance is louder, has more rhythm and is more grounded than Broadway style and it requires much stronger footwork, often in an acapella fashion.

I decided that some preparatory research would help conserve both the limited rehearsal time and restricted financial resources of the commission. It was necessary to examine and define both tap and *Bollywood*, as well as further explore the concepts of narrative, abstraction, form and genre.

Bollywood dance is a fusion of traditional Indian classical dance and modern dance, a style often found in film clips. It has traditions in relation to its style, the type of music, and dance sequences. Importantly, a code of modesty is paramount in *Bollywood* dance. I was aware of the cultural implications that the piece would have; however, upon further reading of *Bollywood: a History* (Mihir 2006) it became evident that the only major considerations were the constraints of modesty and the fact that *Bollywood* performers do not kiss or show any sexual intimacy. Divia Patel depicts the flavour of Bollywood as:

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

Toe tapping, eye catching song and dance sequences, colourful imagery and glamorous costumes, bold characters and expressing emotional extremes, and long plot lines conveying traditional moral values: all of these factors combine to create the distinctive style of a Bollywood film (Patel, Laurens and Caine 2007).

I see many parallels between Music Theatre and *Bollywood*, in particular, song and dance presentations occurring within a piece (as a direct or indirect consequence of a narrative or plot) which are often heightened in style and not necessarily naturalistic in presentation. Music Theatre's tradition is steeped in revue, vaudeville and burlesque. The students who would perform in the production were studying Music Theatre and therefore had a reasonably good understanding of these genres. Like the musicals of the 1930s and 40s, the musical numbers within *Bollywood* productions do not necessarily progress the plot. The style of *Bollywood* gave me strong parameters to work within, and the lack of plot progression freed me to create each song or segment separately – similar to a vaudeville performance with each act being unrelated and the plot or narrative being contained within each segment or song. In terms of rehearsal, different numbers could be rehearsed simultaneously.

As long as *Bollywood* music was used, the dance steps could be inventive and present my own choreographic values, aesthetics and interests, but for authenticity I believed the steps had to find their roots in Indian dance and the Music Television (MTV) video dance clips of the 1980s.

In my approach I looked to Anthony Van Last^{iv} for an example, in particular the approach he took with *Bombay Dreams*^v. Like Van Last, I had to develop what was required for the specific work. I also sought to understand why I was reacting to the piece in a certain way, or indeed, which forces I was responding to – emotional, rhythmic, narrative, melodic and/or visual. In order to understand my responses I examined how others, such as Luigi^{vi} and Bufalino (Bufalino 2004) had worked with a musical focus, Darling's^{vii} use of narrative and/or Cunningham's abstraction (Brown 2003).

It is interesting to note that dance in general has elastic boundaries: tap and other dance forms are fusing in many different ways. This is due to the breaking down of cultural boundaries in our increasingly globalised world. Indian, Oriental and African dance styles had been fused for many years prior to *Bombay Dreams* and before *Bollywood* films became a global phenomenon in the 1990s. *Bollywood* itself was born out of a fusion of dance; it is a melding of traditional Indian dance and popular western cultural influences such as MTV. Similarly,

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

tap was born out of a fusion between Irish, Dutch, African and American cultures, whereas the jazz dance which informed my dance education evolved through a blending of styles initiated by Jack Cole^{viii} which included classical, Afro-Cuban, jazz and Indian dance styles.

My piece would also be made from a melding of styles and Indian influences, but targeted at a largely Western audience. This was difficult because *Bollywood* music does not necessarily fit with Western tap dance or other dance conventions. An additional challenge was to find music that would not over-extend the dance vocabulary of the students performing the dance piece. Most of the students' dance experience was limited to a couple of years of tap, jazz and ballet, focused on Music Theatre and Broadway dance in particular. Historically, tap has been applied to 2/4, 3/4 or 4/4 styles of music, with a predominant '1' starting the phrase. Typically *Bollywood* music can change time signature within a song and utilises strong drumming, whereas music used for tap dancing often omits the percussion or uses light brushes from the rhythm section, leaving the more lively percussion to the dancers performing the tap steps.

The selection of music for the production was my next priority. Often Indian music tracks or *Bollywood* film music have dramatic introductions with no further dynamic development or climax, and are usually in a style derived from a blend of Mumbai music, 80s electronic disco and MTV influences. Most traditional Indian music utilises different time signatures within a piece, making a choreographed percussive dance accompaniment more challenging for the choreographer and the dancers. As classical Indian music is usually not notated and frequently improvised, it was necessary to find music with a more regular time signature. After many hours of listening and appraisal for choreographic potential, a short list of tracks was selected for choreographic workshop. Music was chosen for its applicability to dance and for the musical light and shade it could bring to the piece. The opening score chosen was an early 90s dance track called *Give it Up* (Dupre 1993). Based around a tribal drumming rhythm with Eastern influences, it musically builds to a strong climax. For this purpose the sounds were energetic, and there was enough variation in the dynamics of the music for the tapping to be heard at the same time as the accompaniment.

Unlike Van Last, who worked with music specifically commissioned for *Bombay Dreams*, I needed to ensure the dance production ran smoothly and efficiently during the conceptual phase, later during the practical development of dance steps and, critically, during rehearsal.

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

Therefore, it was essential to find pre-recorded Indian-style music with a constant beat which could be followed rhythmically, or at the very least readily analysed for choreographic purposes.

I approached a graduating student, Nerissa Jayasingha, to work as my assistant and lead performer. Nerissa, is of Sri Lankan heritage, has specific knowledge of and enthusiasm for *Bollywood*, and has participated in *Bollywood* dance groups. Nerissa was an asset to the process, not only because of her studies in dance, Music Theatre and *Bollywood*, but because she had just completed the course in which the other students were studying and could relate to them as peers, and to me as an industry professional. It was also useful to have Nerissa interpret the steps from a feminine perspective as the choreography required a different approach for men and women. The modes of working for men and women are associated with traditions and customs relating to religion and a code of modesty; hence they need to be different. Nerissa was very good at breaking down the content and making it accessible to the students and her input greatly improved the rehearsal process.

The choreography was researched. The documentaries on the DVDs of *Bride and Prejudice*^{ix} and *Bombay Dreams* showed the breaking down of dance steps and their constituent forms and aided my own formation of routines and dance steps. I also looked at how Van Last had worked with a muse or choreographic assistant. Following the viewing of the video footage, and after my assistant, Nerissa, attended *Bollywood* dance classes with Sydney *Bollywood* dance expert, Farah Shah, we had two days to physically experiment with the piece, and formulate the initial draft of the performance format.

The concept stage comprised of improvisation and exploration. Once I was satisfied, I recorded the steps on paper or film so that they could be taught to the dancers at a later date. Often when choreographing it is easier to see the steps danced by someone else and then manipulate the movements and shapes of the choreography, rather than pursue your own exactness or precision. Van Last describes working with an assistant in a similar fashion:

I find that if I spend too much time learning the steps then my mind becomes about the steps. I mean I can do the steps but I don't want to spend too much time learning them. But, in a way the steps are my paints and I want to be able to take the different paints and make the overall picture.

Working with Nerissa as a foil gave another lens to view the choreography during the initial workshop and improvisation phase. This was a departure from my usual process of creating

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

steps and then teaching them to the artists and it provided a double benefit in that Nerissa could demonstrate and workshop my thoughts as well as give feedback from the perspective and practice of a *Bollywood* dancer. During the workshop phase I also used a video camera to record and reflect upon the day's work and rehearsal. This utilisation of the camera was something I had rarely explored in my working processes prior to this project. It was an effective way of reviewing the steps and, if time permitted, adjusting them before they became embedded in the piece.

Because my exposure to tap had primarily been through dance school training in Australia, classes with international experts, and my work on franchised Broadway musicals, I considered that it would be useful to workshop ideas with another tap dance practitioner who had done more in the area of tribal rhythms or funk tap. With this in mind, I organised two workshop sessions with Melbourne tap dance practitioner, Grant Swift^x.

Grant is largely self-taught. His background is diverse – he had been a boxer, stripper and street fighter and found an interest in tap dancing later in life. He learnt his craft busking on the streets and at workshops in the United States. Many of his steps do not come from what would be considered rudimentary tap technique or training, but arise from improvisation, rarely with a need to repeat the same step or figure in an identical fashion. For me, this was a very different way of working. Within commercial or Music Theatre dance it is expected that the steps can be repeated with precision as most work is done as part of an ensemble, and often with the notion of a clear progression in narrative concept. However, Grant's work relied on his mood and the steps were different upon each retelling.

Grant rarely worked with recorded music. When he did work with music, the live musicians followed him. In contrast, my mode of practice aligns with Brenda Bufalino's and the idea of being able to sing or scat what you are dancing (Bufalino 2004). This premise relies on the fact that you know the tune and can repeat it. The steps that were work-shopped with Grant in these sessions often did not translate back to the rehearsal room and would not fit with the music. Grant does not count steps in or give tempo markings, and often does not know how to musically count the choreographic phrase he has just created. His conveying of knowledge or musicality did not fit with my more structured approach based on many years of dance and music training. Nor was it consistent with any dance methodology or vernacular readily

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

used by trained dancers, and thus would not readily transfer knowledge to the student dancers who were learning conventional dance terminology.

As artists we did not have a common language to ‘platform’ the work. Rather than take complete ideas or phrases from these sessions I used the influence of his work or artistic taste. I then tried to place it in a framework in which I could work, mindful of the constraints of the commission – limited time, limited budget, the designated style of music, and the dancers’ availability and capabilities.

After these sessions I abandoned the idea of working with Grant, but it meant that I had squandered money that could have gone to other aspects of the commission. However, working with Grant did unlock my idea of tap and pushed me into some important revelations regarding tap. Tap is limited by a finite number of ways a dancer can execute figures or movements of the feet to create the steps, be it forward, backward or sideways. The number of manipulations with the feet in this percussive manner is finite, especially with the tap dancers having only an intermediate level of training. Funk tap was really the same as anything I had ever learnt; just the ordering of the steps and the colouring or interpretation of them were different, at times radically. I had to look at Grant’s methods of working, contrast them with mine, and define the difference. I then rearranged his contributions to suit the music and the work. I realised many of the steps we used had common elements, but the order was different, as was the approach to style and his use of accents which ultimately did not fit the music. I then went back to the drawing board knowing that I had to trust my own work, but utilise the steps in a manner that would complement *Bollywood* and possibly indicate funk tap.

Nerissa supplied many ‘best’ of *Bollywood* DVDs^{xi} and these cinematic dance routines were studied. The major difficulty with analysing such performances was that each dance routine is made up of many film cuts and sequences, with each segment of choreography rarely being longer than 15 seconds. There is continuously a new image appearing and the film editing makes the choreography and stage appear to move or shift faster than it actually is. Also, a dance step or sequence can be more difficult when used in film, as it only has to be shot once and can be edited and repeated for effect. In a live performance a different sort of stamina is required to repeat or execute fast, difficult or tiring work; the verve of the film dance sequences might prove difficult to replicate in a live stage production.

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

Because the excitement and visual potency of these filmed performances came from the editing of the film to create a fast effect, cinematic dancers don't have to learn more one than one sequence at a time. However, a stage presentation cannot be done in 10 second bursts – this production was to last for 20 minutes. I would require fast movement, use vibrant colour and interesting formations and, to maintain the high energy, the performers involved in *Bollywood Meets Tap* would dance complete routines and be on stage for an average of 10 to 15 minutes. That way, the energy would be maintained throughout the 20-minute production to reproduce the cinematic effects of *Bollywood* on a live stage, This approach would create an image closer to the cinematic one that the public might expect from *Bollywood* and one that the Commonwealth Games and Ballarat City representatives would anticipate.

A similar translation from film to stage was carried out by Peter Darling, the choreographer of *Billy Elliot the Musical*. The Australian production's resident choreographer, Tom Hodgson, explained that the choreography in the 'Angry' dance (where Billy confronts his personal anger, against the backdrop of the miners' and police riot), had to be manipulated to give the same effect and urgency as the original cinematic dance. This was done through the changing of audience focus with fast moving shields, barricades, white noise and lighting.

In the same way, it was important to guide the focus of the live audience to a similar perspective of the cameraman filming *Bollywood*. By speeding up some steps and slowing others down simultaneously, the audience's attention would be drawn to different parts of the choreography. For example, if the slow steps are in the background and the fast ones in the foreground, the audience's focus will be drawn to the latter. Manipulation of the viewers' gaze in this way ensured that they were encouraged where to look at any given moment. As Anthony Van Last affirms:

I have to be able to tell the audience who to watch at any one moment – the audience's eye always knows how to watch.

In getting to this point I had explored many aspects of choreography and dance and it was now critical that I created my own unique choreographic interpretation of *Bollywood*. Whilst it could pay homage to, and reference, various choreographers and genres it was imperative that my work contained a sense of originality. The points I had been given were only the beginning of the process.

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

The commission was potentially limited by the abilities the students had at this point in their education. Their relative inexperience would usually require a longer rehearsal period than what was available. One of the stipulations of the commission was to use performing arts students from the Arts Academy at the University of Ballarat. With this came positive and negative ramifications. Yes, they were enthusiastic, but they had varied talents and abilities at this stage in their studies as Music Theatre students. Had the performers been auditioned, professional dancers, there would have been a broader range of skills, greater speed in learning and potentially a different outcome. As a choreographer, the work I had imagined was one thing, but a reconciliation between what was imagined and what could be achieved was another thing. This is often the case when the choreographer's expectation of the work cannot necessarily be matched by the capabilities of the performers. Further, the students were volunteers and, while giving their time freely, there were difficulties in commanding complete commitment to the project due to their studies and part-time work commitments.

When an idea was transmitted to the dancers and put on the floor there was very little time to change any part of the choreography. Because of this, along with the volume and intricacy of the choreography, my research prior to the commencement of the project was essential and extremely beneficial. Since the routines took time to teach and refine, the dancers had to learn quickly and only minor changes were possible in the available time.

I had eight days to work with the dancers and then later a few rehearsals were organised to maintain and polish the performance. This was a very short creative development and rehearsal period – the first decision often became the final one, with only an occasional luxury to review or change a section. The initial choreography workshop consisted of 40 hours of floor time where the performance could be taught and work-shopped with the students. There was also a maximum of eight hours rehearsal leading up to the performance dates, a total of 48 hours.

In comparison with Adrian Burnett, former resident choreographer with the Australian Ballet, it seems that this number of hours is more likely to be the standard with a piece of work that is re-staged and not an original work. He cited the example of *Aesthetic Arrest*^{xvii} which had a cast of 16 dancers and performers. It was a 20-minute piece designed for a triple-bill program. They rehearsed daily for four weeks minimum, and then had a spacing call, and a four-hour lighting call, two dress rehearsals and a notes session – a total of 98 hours. This

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

was a re-mounting of a work by professional dancers who had worked on the piece before, not a new work for a specific commission that would be debuted in Ballarat for the Commonwealth Games event and performed by inexperienced student dancers.

Tom Hodgson, Associate Choreographer for *Billy Elliott* at the time, had a different assessment of the timeframe needed. His view was formulated after mounting his own works or appearing in the works of Lloyd Newson's DV8^{xiii}. To create a 20-minute performance of new choreography to music which he had not worked with before, he required dancers to work with him full-time for 38 hours per week for four weeks – a total of 152 hours. By most reasonable measures, *Bollywood Meets Tap* was created with a very frugal time and resource allocation.

It was obvious that I would need many sections with different performers rehearsing simultaneously. If a song or segment had a narrative, I would work on that piece from start to finish. However, if my choreography was coming from a response to the music, certain segments of percussive choreography would move around within the piece until I was satisfied they were located where they would most aptly fit. In this manner my work sometimes aligned with choreographers who responded to music and in other sections it aligned with choreographers who were more concerned with narrative and structure, such as choreographers Peter Darling, Agnes De Mille^{xiv} and Jerome Robbins (Conrad & Robbins 2000).

Knowing the limited time and money I was working with I approached Professor Peter Matthews, Head of School, Arts Academy of the University of Ballarat, for assistance. Not only could I rely on him for support, but he offered his skills in relation to the piece. *Bollywood Meets Tap* would place the Arts Academy in the public spotlight and as Head of this Academy, Peter had an interest in the production's success, and so his expertise in dance and event coordination came at no extra cost to the production. Peter has a background as a professional contemporary dancer and choreographer and is well versed in the area of community events, having worked with many organisations, including Regional Arts Victoria. He was able to guide the dancers in relation to lifts and *pas de deux*, offer suggestions, and provide another set of eyes during the final rehearsal and staging of the production. With Peter and Nerissa on board it was possible to run rehearsals in three rooms simultaneously. I

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

could set new work in one room and then it could be rehearsed and refined by Peter and Nerissa. This proved a very effective way of working within our short time frame

The budget for this commission consisted of \$2000 from the Live Site Managers, and an additional \$1500 from the Arts Academy of the University of Ballarat. The Site Managers provided the marketing, logistics, staging and infrastructure for the performance.

Costuming was the most expensive part of the budget. Through the goodwill of Nerissa and her family, various costumes were lent to us, and the other girls' costumes were sourced for a total of \$500 by shopping at Indian supermarkets in Dandenong, on the outskirts of Melbourne. As long as the general sizes of the girls' costumes were right, it was possible to adjust them by drawing in with laces and drawstrings built into the costumes. To keep the cost down, one of the students arranged for a bulk purchase of fisherman pants from an Asian market and the men provided their own singlets. Cristina D'Agostino, who featured in the *pas de deux* section, was able to provide her own costume from her dance competition wardrobe. This meant that the total cost of costumes was a very frugal \$700.

Ballarat City Council was appointed by the Commonwealth Games Authority as pre-event coordinator of the Live Site. The City Council's role was to facilitate the cultural program in the Camp Street Arts Precinct (Ballarat) during the set-up process, make sure the event was properly coordinated and then hand over to the Live Event Managers who would manage the performances.

There were communication problems with both the Council and the Live Event Managers. I had anticipated that there would be difficulties regarding the stage and facilities that were promised by the producers. From previous experience working on commissions I knew there were always problems relating to the logistics of any live event involving multiple partners working in relative isolation until the event. This was also related to the fact that, even though I had stipulated my requirements for the stage – which were agreed to by the Council representative – the people assembling it were sub-contractors, perhaps not used to working with dancers and perhaps not understanding the requirements.

The stage arrived and was assembled the night before our only rehearsal at the facility. We were scheduled to perform a trial run in the morning and then our first performance at lunch time. The actual dimensions of the stage were different to those given in the briefing. I was assured that the stage would be ten by eight metres. It was, in fact, eight by six. The stage

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

was constructed out of various platforms that were joined together and not level. These platforms were separate boxes joined together and therefore had the potential to move independently. Each platform had separate aluminium edging which was rough, uneven and potentially dangerous for dancers in bare feet. Footwear was not a preferred solution as it would be stylistically and culturally inconsistent with the *Bollywood* costumes. The limited space was hindered by extra sound equipment and extra speakers placed on the stage. At the final performance microphone stands were added to the stage because we were being followed by a musical act that required amplification. This reduced the useable floor space to an even smaller scale.

At each performance the ground rules changed. I was constantly asked to modify the choreography to fit different obstacles. After my initial viewing of the stage and further consultation with the Live Site Managers I approached Peter Matthews, Arts Academy, University of Ballarat, for advice. Peter then made enquiries with the Occupational Health and Safety Department of the University. The Site Managers remained firm about what we had to work with and it was decided that, unless a compromise could be met and our safety concerns were addressed, the piece would not be performed. The event organisers then offered to tape the joins in the platforms and allow for more rehearsal time on stage. The dancers were consulted and agreed that they could perform if the joins in the stage were covered and if they could wear foot thongs throughout the performance.

Also, a few days prior to the initial performance soloist, Cristina D'Agostino, damaged a rib practising a lift from the *pas de deux* section. As there was no understudy, the choreography had to be altered so that she could perform adequately without further injury.

The sound equipment and CD player on the edge of the stage created much difficulty as the stage was not stable and the CD player skipped when the floor moved. During the initial performance the music skipped and the performers had to reset and start again. At the second performance it skipped forward 20 seconds, causing the dancers to get out of step with the music. Thereafter the music was transferred to a computer hard drive. In my opinion, such difficulties arose due to the out-sourcing of technical crew for the project. These technicians were only brought in to assist with sessions and were not familiar with what we had rehearsed or the requirements previously agreed to with the Council representatives. At each

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

performance we were confronted with different obstacles and challenges; a different set of negotiations would occur, depending on the challenges presented that day.

Additionally, videoing of the project had been authorised by the Council, but the Commonwealth Games Live Site Managers were not informed of this agreement and last minute negotiations had to occur on the day of the filming to allow it to happen. Such matters, while unpredictable and frustrating, are all part of the cut and thrust of large scale outdoor events managed by different agencies for different purposes.

The success of creating *Bollywood Meets Tap*, a commission with many constraints, rested in the methods used to overcome these obstacles. These methods were drawn from techniques I had already practised and others developed specifically to answer the calls this production placed upon me. My research prior to the rehearsal period and the economical use of practice time was particularly useful. *Bollywood Meets Tap* was considered a successful venture by many, as described, for example, on the web page *Bollywood Down Under* stating that:

The hypnotic rhythm of *Bollywood* greeted Victorian Premier Steve Bracks to Ballarat's Commonwealth Games live site in Camp St yesterday. Mr Bracks visited Ballarat to watch the Commonwealth Games basketball at the MinerDome and then watched Indian-style dancers at the live site. 'I think it's magnificent,' Mr Bracks said. The *Bollywood Meets Tap* dancers, third year students at the University of Ballarat's Arts Academy, clearly impressed Mr Bracks. After the performance he spoke to the dancers, and had high praise, saying they could do well either here in Australia or in Bollywood's home of India.^{xv}

It would of course be unusual if a work was not constrained in some way by resources such as knowledge, time, money, and the availability of performers. What is imagined and what actually happens is something that must be reconciled prior to, during, and upon reflection of the final work. In examining the real world constraints of my choreographic commission and the associated colouring of the creative outcomes, I came to certain conclusions related to my examination of the interplay between theory, my own artistic history and the constraints encountered throughout the process. I set out to produce and choreograph a piece defined by the following factors – the knowledge I could bring to the commission, timeframes, casting restrictions, limited resources and difficult communication between the parties involved. The constraints I worked with were very similar to those anyone working with a large scale community event might encounter, where the commissioners or the producers of any piece usually set the limitations. *Bollywood Meets Tap* was created with the voice or knowledge I had at the time, and in response to the intrinsic limitations of the commission. If I were to

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

create such a piece again some of the practises utilised would be the same. However, the knowledge I have now accumulated would be broader and would provide greater options and insights relating to other ways of working as a choreographer.

My own experience provided some answers (but perhaps more questions), as to how I might approach a commission in the future; this one involved exploration of concepts that were familiar, plus areas that had previously only held nominal interest for me as an artist and choreographer. A deeper analysis of the work of others, and a desire to pass on the teachings and discoveries of both the practitioners and the many movements within the dance world that have informed my work was for me a major outcome of this project.

These discoveries strengthened my desire to develop a universal systematic archiving of dance, particularly tap. Dance is an ephemeral form and what is archived in notes or on film does not always give a clear guide as to how steps or figures were formulated or might be faithfully reproduced. The ideas and knowledge translated between artists is limited by the language with which they can communicate. This limitation is also evident in terms of tap dancing and the way it is notated. Often there is no link to the music, nor is there a codified language because dancers have many ways of describing steps or movements. My use of onomatopoeic words to describe tap throughout my teaching career and during the rehearsal process suggests further enquiry; in particular the development of a new teaching and notation system for tap dance so that choreography can be accurately replicated. This approach has the capacity to provide a significant contribution to the future of percussive dance education, and the archive which records what has traditionally been passed down by word of foot.

In the light of the advances in technology in the last fifty years, it is fascinating to note that the relationship between dance and music has also changed. The resources often used in dance making are now merely a recording of a work by an artist and a device to play it on. Budgetary constraints have generally forced this approach as well as the lack of musicians available or willing to collaborate with dance makers. Such collaborative relationships are now rarer. In casual consultation with Luigi (the first person to create his own codified jazz dance syllabus), it was obvious that he felt this situation had changed the understanding of who was leading the dance. In the past, when he worked with live musicians, there would be lively discussion as to where and when the accents in a piece would be played, the feeling of

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

the piece and the tempo. Today those questions are often answered by who is editing the music for a purpose rather than who is playing for the choreographer, or who are the collaborators.

In retrospect, I can now acknowledge my tacit choreographic knowledge and its application to the creation of *Bollywood Meets Tap*. The research phase leading up to the rehearsal period reinforced my usual approach and I instinctively choreographed the piece as I had my previous work. I now see parallels with the approaches of artists such as Darling, Bufalino, Luigi and Cole. Without conscious analysis at the time, it is now clear that I responded to pulses, melody and narrative structures in the manner I always had done in the past. I had learnt to choreograph through years of trial, error and practice, and from watching and perceiving the work of others who were most probably inspired and informed by the leading choreographers of the 20th Century.

Since finalising the project and once again reviewing the work of Antony Van Last, it is interesting to see that we had parallel perspectives. His work provided a strong guide to my process. He followed the journey of other dance makers like Graham^{xvi} and Cole in melding forms and developing what he needed to make his process of creation successful. His tacit choreographic knowledge and training in contemporary dance had provided a platform useful to *Bombay Dreams*. I used my own tacit knowledge of tap and jazz in a similar way within *Bollywood Meets Tap*.

My previous work, as well as the research I did for *Bollywood Meets Tap* gave me the tools to deal with the constraints I encountered.

For me, there was to some extent a closing of a circle. Dance is global and forms have crossed many boundaries. Armed with the knowledge gained from Van Last and the other choreographic pioneers that I had researched or been informed by, I had set forth to create the piece predicting the constraints that I would have to deal with. The knowledge I have acquired from my previous work, my research for this piece plus an awareness of the likely constraints to making *Bollywood Meets Tap* will indeed shape the work and my approach to any future commissions.

Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

David Wynen

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Bollywood Meets Tap: undertaking a commissioned dance event

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Endnotes

- ⁱ *42nd Street* the musical, with a book by Michael Stewart and Mark Bramble, lyrics by Al Dubin, and music by Harry Warren, is based on a book and subsequent 1933 film
- ⁱⁱ Brenda Bufalino: tap dance artist, educator and author, long-time dance partner of Honi Coles
- ⁱⁱⁱ Josh Hilberman: avant-garde contemporary American tap choreographer, dancer and educator
Jason Samuels-Smith: tap dancer, choreographer and performer. He appeared in *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*. Rusty Frank: tap dance historian and educator.
- ^{iv} Anthony Van Last is a contemporary dancer and choreographer. Credits include: *Mamma Mia, Joseph and his Technicolor Dreamcoat, Bombay Dreams, Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Song and Dance*
- ^v *Bombay Dreams*, 2004 Directed by Andrew Lloyd Webber, United Kingdom: Eagle Eye Media
- ^{vi} Luigi: (1925–) seminal figure in jazz dance and the first to create his own codified jazz syllabus; also the first teacher to publish a syllabus and accompanying recording of music tailored to each routine and exercise
- ^{vii} Peter Darling: physical performer and choreographer; *Billy Elliot, Company, Lord of the Rings – the Musical*.
- ^{viii} Cole, Jack, *Beale St Blues*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcwwcPvoCjU> (accessed 16/05/12)
- ^{ix} *Bride and Prejudice* is a 2004 Indian/British/American romantic musical film directed by Gurinder Chadha. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel by Jane Austen, published in 1797. It has been adapted for the stage and screen many times and is considered a literary classic.
- ^x Grant Swift: a New Zealander working in Melbourne. Grant dances mainly as a soloist, often working unaccompanied; his work comes from improvisation with rarely a need to repeat the same step or figure in an identical fashion
- ^{xi} Bollywood CD's and DVD's are generally sold in Indian grocery stores and do not credit copyright or artists.
- ^{xii} *Aesthetic Arrest* – a twenty-minute ballet originally presented as a part of a triple bill by the Australian Ballet, choreographed by Adrian Burnett – debut performance December 3, 2004 at Sydney Opera House. It must be acknowledged here that the Australian Ballet operates with very generous funding from the Commonwealth Government and philanthropic sources.
- ^{xiii} DV8: Physical Theatre and Dance Company formed in 1986, with work revolving around contemporary politically based dance and theatre pieces
- ^{xiv} Agnes De Mille (1905–1993): Music Theatre and dance choreographer
- ^{xv} Bollywood Down Under, <http://www.bollywood-down-under.com/BlogArchive/Jan30,2006-Mar25,2006.htm> (accessed 16/05/12)
- ^{xvi} Martha Graham: (1894–1991), a seminal choreographer and pioneer of modern dance who created a new language of movement