Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance and Speaking Dance
Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion

Both Sitting Duet (2002), The Quiet Dance (2005) and Speaking Dance (2006) form the first trilogy of duets made by choreographer Jonathan Burrows and composer Matteo Fargion, who over the last 10 years have given over 300 performances across 31 countries, including winning a 2004 New York Dance And Performance 'Bessie' Award. Their work is a gentle exploration into how the relationship between music and dance is perceived and the fragile but permeable boundaries between the two worlds. It is a formal but humorous meditation on the nature of communication, and the relationship between the two performers and their audience.

'It was certainly one of the funniest and most ingenious dances seen in New York in a long time.'
The New York Times

'I emerged from the French premiere of Both Sitting Duet in a veritable glow, my world expanded, its walls tumbling down.'
The danceinsider.com

'Absurdist self-indulgence you'll be thinking, but what you see is revelation and joy.'
The Evening Standard, London

'One of the most enchanting things I've ever seen.'
The Daily Telegraph, London

'By now we ought to be accustomed to the surprises the wry, spry and elegant pairing of Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion keep springing on us, but somehow we're not; they've always got an extra rabbit in the hat to take us unawares. With Speaking Dance there's a whole family of baby rabbits in that roomy hat.'
Ballet Magazine, UK

Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion are supported by Kaaitheater Brussels, PACT Zollverein Essen, Sadler's Wells Theatre London and BIT Teatgarasjen Bergen.

Burrows and Fargion are currently in-house artists at the Nightingale, Brighton England.

Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance and Speaking Dance have been supported by Kaaitheater Brussels; Dance Umbrella London; NOTT Dance Festival, England; Joint Adventures Munich; The Arts Council of England; PARTS/Rosas; Dance 4; The Laban Centre London and the Jonathan Burrows Group.

Management: Nigel Hinds – nigel@nigelhinds.co.uk

More information at www.jonathanburrows.info

Duration of pieces: 35 minutes, 35 minutes and 45 minutes
Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance, Speaking Dance, Cheap Lecture, The Cow Piece, Counting To One Hundred and One Flute Note form part of a growing a body of duets made by Burrows and Fargion, who have given over 300 performances since 2002 across the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK and the USA.

Counting To One Hundred and One Flute Note 2013
Brighton, the Nightingale, January 23
Lancaster, Nuffield Theatre, January 28
Maasmechelen, CCM, February 6
Brussels, Kaaithèater, February 7/8/9
Plymouth, Peninsular Arts, February 28th
Lausanne, Théâtre Sévelin 36, March 23
Amsterdam, Frascati, March 27/28
Dresden, Hellerau, April 14
Montreal, Usine C, May 11
Modena, VIE Festival Contemporea, June 1
Grenoble, MC2, June 13
Essen, PACT Zollverein, June 22
Vienna, Impulstanz, July 18
Bergen, BIT Teatgarasjen, October 19

One Flute Note 2013
Nottingham, NottDance Festival, March 17
Modena, VIE Festival Contemporea, May 31
Dusseldorf, Tanzkongress 2013, June 8

Counting To One Hundred 2013
Fosdinovo, Castello in Movimento, July 26

Cheap Lecture and The Cow Piece 2013
Lausanne, Théâtre Sévelin 36, March 22
Beirut, Beirut International Platform of Dance, April 20
Montreal, Usine C, May 9/10
Bergen, BIT Teatgarasjen, October 20
Nurnberg, Duetthiennale, November 23
Cambridge, The Junction, November 30

Show And Tell, 2013
London, Baylis at Sadler's Wells, February 25
Modena, VIE Festival Contemporea, June 1
Munich, Tanzwerkstatt Europa, Aug 2
Bergen, BIT Teatgarasjen, October 21

Speaking Dance, 2013
Beirut, Beirut International Platform of Dance, April 20
Grenoble, MC2, June 14
Fosdinovo, Castello in Movimento, July 26
One Flute Note 2012  
London, Dance Umbrella Festival, October 5/14  

Counting To One Hundred 2012  
London, BDE South Bank Centre, February 4  
Brussels, Kaaithesater, February 10/11  
Modena, VIE Festival Contemporea, May 25/26  
Vienna, Impulstanz, August 7  
Paris, Fondation Cartier, September 10  
Frankfurt, Frankfurt Lab/Forsythe Company, September 22  
London, Dance Umbrella Festival, October 10/14  

Cheap Lecture and The Cow Piece 2012  
Paris, Fondation Cartier, January 9  
Brussels, Kaaithesater, February 8  
Ljubljana, Cankarjev Dom, March 20/21  
Dublin, Dublin Dance Festival, May 21/22  
Varna, ITF Varna Summer, June 4  
Sofia, National Theatre, June 5  
Berlin, Tanz Im August/Schaubune, August 14/15  
Perth, MoveMe Festival, August 28  
Frankfurt, Frankfurt Lab/Forsythe Company, September 21  
London, Dance Umbrella Festival, October 7/13  
Copenhagen, Dansehallerne, October 27  
Helsinki, Moving In November, November 3  

Speaking Dance 2012  
Modena, VIE Festival Contemporea, May 25/26  
Frankfurt, Frankfurt Lab/Forsythe Company, September 22  
London, Dance Umbrella Festival, October 12  

Both Sitting Duet 2012  
Frankfurt, Frankfurt Lab/Forsythe Company, September 23  

Cheap Lecture and The Cow Piece 2011  
Berlin, Akademie Der Kunst, February 10  
Milan, Uovo Festival, March 18  
Bologna, Xing, Dom Theatre, April 15  
Utrecht, Springdance Festival, April 16  
Brighton, Brighton Festival, The Basement, May 20/21  
Essen, PACT Zollverein, June 1/2  
Madrid, In-Presentable, June 15  
Bergen, BIT Studio Bergen, September 8/9  
Istanbul, i-Dans, October 2  
Bucharest, eXplore dance festival, October 15  
Bergen, BIT Studio Bergen September 8/9  
New York, Danspace, November 3/5  
Leeds, Dance House, November 17  
Lancaster, Nuffield Theatre, December 3  

Counting To One Hundred 2011  
London, Siobhan Davies Studio, July 15
Munich, Tanzwerkstatt Europa, August 6
Derby, Déda, September 16
Brighton, The Nightingale, October 18
Leicester, De Montfort University, December 2

Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance and Speaking Dance 2011
Caernarfon, Migrations Festival, March 31
New York, Danspace, November 3/4
Lublin, International Dance Theatres Festival, November 11

Cheap Lecture and The Cow Piece 2010
Maasmechelen, Belgium, CCM, February 22
Toronto, Dancemakers Centre for Creation, March 6
Mechelen, kc nOna, March 13
Amsterdam, Frascati, April 9/10
Munich, Muffathalle, May 11/12
Bremen, LIME, June 8
Olomouc Czech Republic, Divadelni Flora, June 15
Poznan, Poland, Stary Browar, July 2
Vienna, Impulstanz Festival, August 8/9
Riga, The New Theatre Institute of Latvia, August 27
Graz, Steirischer Herbst Festival, October 8/9
Florence, Cantiere Goldonetta, October 10
Modena, Scena Contemporanea Festival, October 11/12
London, Dance Umbrella Festival, October 13/14/15

Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance and Speaking Dance 2010
Toronto, Dancemakers Centre for Creation, March 5/6
Hamburg, Kampnagel, May 27/28

Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance, Speaking Dance and Cheap Lecture 2009
Maasmechelen, Belgium, CCM, March 17/18/19
Dartington, Dartington Arts, April 22/23
Perth, Pica, April 26
Stockholm, Weld, May 7/8
Chalon, La Comete, Scene National, May 12
Istanbul, iDans Festival, May 19/20
Essen, PACT Zollverein, June 26/27
Santarcangelo, Santarcangelo Festival, July 3/4/5
Findhorn, Scotland, Bodysurf Scotland, July 10
Brussels, Het Theaterfestival, Kaaithéater, September 2
Budapest, TRAFÓ - House of Contemporary Arts, October 12/13
Bucharest, eXplore Dance Festival, October 15/16
Alkanena, Portugal, Festival Materiais Diversos, November 20
Brussels, Kaaithéater, December 17/18/19

Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance and Speaking Dance 2008
London, Sadlers Wells Theatre, January 11/12/17/18/25/26
Zurich, Theaterhaus Gessnerallee, January 15/16
Berne, Kulturhallen Dampfzentrale, January 27
Royal Holloway, The Boilerhouse, January 30
Frankfurt, Mousonturm, February, 22/23
Leicester, De Motfort University, February 26
Bremen, Tanz Bremen, March 5
Leipzig, Euroscene, March 9
Brussels, Kaaithéater, April 19
Umea, MADE Festival, May 8
Lisbon, Alkantara Festival, June 3/4
Florence, Goldoni Theatre, June 14
Montpelier, Festivales Des Promenades, July 12
Kalamata, Kalamata Dance Festival, July 20/22
Munich, Tanzwerkstatt Europa, August 15
Amsterdam, Frascati Theatre, September 26/27
Bergen, Oktoberdans, October 28
Leipzig, Euroscene, November 5/6
Parma, Festival Natura Dei Teatri, November 15
Dieppe, Too Much Festival, November 18
Lyon, Maison De La Danse, November 20/21/22
Eastleigh, The Point, November 27/28
Berlin, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, December 5

*Both Sitting Duet, The Quiet Dance and Speaking Dance 2007*
Brussels, Kaaithéater, February 8/13/17
Maasmechelen, CCM, February 15
Cesana, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, March 3/4
Paris, Dessus Dessous, April 13/14
Utrecht, Springdance Festival, April 27/28
Milan, Ouvo, May 15
Seoul, MODAFE, June 4/5
Madrid, in-Presentable, June 16/17
Poznan, Stary Browar, June 30/July 1
St Etienne, Festival de 7 Collines, July 6/7
Vienna, Impulstanz, July 13/20/21
Nyon, Festival Des Arts Vivants, August 15/16
Berlin, Tanz Im August, August 25/26
Tallin, August Dance Festival, August 31
Riga, International Festival Of Contemporary Theatre, September 27/28/29
Lille, UKMoves, October 6
Marseille, Marseille Objectif Danse, October 10
Nottingham, NottDance Festival, October 12
Aberdeen, Citymoves, October 13
Modena, Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione, October 17/18
São Paulo, SECS, October 30/31
Rio de Janeiro, Panorama Festival, November 3/4
Leipzig, Euroscene, November 7/8
Dartington, Dartington Arts, November 19

*Both Sitting Duet and The Quiet Dance 2006*
Barcelona, Sala De Beckett, January 20/21
Bologna, Galleria d’Arte Modena, April 21
Nottingham, NottDance Festival, May 2
Florence, Cantieri Goldonetta, June 5
Vienna, ImPulsTanz Festival, July 26
Vilnius, National Theatre, September 24
Brussels, Kaaitheater, October 11
Helsinki, Moving In October Festival, Oct 28/29
Oulu, Cultural Centre, October 31/Nov 1
Modena, Scena Contemporanea Festival, October 24
Royal Holloway, The Boiler Room, November 8

Both Sitting Duet 2005
Cardiff, Wales Millenium Centre, January 6/7
Genk, Culturcentrum Genk, January 14
Rome, Auditorium, February 13
Chicago, Links Hall, March 4/5/6
Strasbourg, May 12/13
Harstaad, June 18
Munich, Muffiathalle, August 7
Brussels, Kaaitheater Studios, October 13/14
London, Dance Umbrella Festival, The Place Theatre, October 17/18
Bristol, Arnolfini, December 2

Both Sitting Duet 2004
New York, The Kitchen, March 11/12/13
Antwerp, CCB, April 28
Dublin, International Dance Festival Ireland, May 20/21
Zagreb, Dance Week Festival, May 26
Marseilles, Marseilles Objectif Danse, June 3/4/5
Madrid, La Casa Encendida, June 17/18
Fribourg, Switzerland, Belluard Bollwerk International, July 6
Amsterdam, Julidans, July 7
Munich, Tanzwerkstatt Europa, August 6
Geneva, Theatre du Grutli, September 2/3
Val De Marne, Biennale Nationale de Danse du Val-de-Marne, September 23
Bergen, Teater Garasjen, October 11
Maasmechelen, Belgium, CCM, October 28
Dartington, Dartington Hall, November 2
London, Royal Opera House Clore Studio, November 10/11/12/17/18/19/24/25/26
Huddersfield, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, November 22
Brighton, The Dome, December 3
Florence, Dec 7/8
Bologna, Raum, December 9

Both Sitting Duet 2003
Brussels, Kaaitheater, January 8/9
Stockholm, Panacea Festival, January 26
Nottingham, NOTTDance Festival, May 17th
Paris, Menagerie De Verre, June 6/7
Vienna, ImPulstanz Festival, July 18/20
Berlin, Tanz Im August, August 29/30
Milan, Uovo Festival, September 13
Lisbon, Gulbenkian Centre, September 19/20
Yokohama, Yokohama Arts Foundation, September 27/28
Montreal, Festival International de Nouvelle Danse, October 5
Leuven, Klapstuk Festival, October 12/13
London, Dance Umbrella Festival, The Place Theatre, October 15/16/17
Chester, Chester College of H.E., October 22

*Both Sitting Duet* 2002
Brussels, Kaaitheater, October 10/11
Frankfurt, Mousonturm, November 2/3
Jonathan Burrows was born in 1960. He danced with the Royal Ballet for 13 years, rising to the rank of soloist, before leaving in 1991 to pursue his own choreography. After touring with his own company for some years he decided in 2001 to concentrate on one to one collaborations with other artists, who would share the conception, making, performing and administering of the work. His first collaboration was *Weak Dance Strong Questions* (2001), made with the theatre maker and performer Jan Ritsema, which toured to 14 countries. This was followed by a series of duets with Matteo Fargion, beginning in 2002 with *Both Sitting Duet*, followed by *The Quiet Dance* (2005), *Speaking Dance* (2006), *Cheap Lecture* (2009), *The Cow Piece* (2009) *Counting To One Hundred* (2011), *One Flute Note* (2012) and *Show And Tell* (2013). The two men have now given over 300 performances across 31 countries. *Both Sitting Duet* won a 2004 New York Dance and Performance 'Bessie' Award, and *Cheap Lecture* was chosen for the 2009 Het Theaterfestival in Belgium. Burrows and Fargion are also contributing artists to William Forsythe’s *Motionbank* website project (2012-). Other high profile commissions include Sylvie Guillem and William Forsythe’s Ballet Frankfurt, and in 2008 he was Associate Director for Peter Handke's *The Hour We Knew Nothing Of Each Other* at the National Theatre, London. His curating work includes *As It Is* (1998) for the South Bank Centre London, *Parallel Voices* (2007) for the Siobhan Davies Studios London and *All The World Likes To Dance To A Beat* (2012) for Fondation Cartier Paris, and he co-curated *Rememebning British New Dance* (2012) in London with Ramsay Burt and *Dance Umbrella 2012* in London with Betsy Gregory. (Burrows has been an Associate Artist at Kunstencentrum Vooruit in Gent, Belgium (1992-2002), London’s South Bank Centre (1998/9) and Kaaitheater Brussels (2008-2010). In 2002 he received an award from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts in New York, in recognition for his ongoing contributions to contemporary dance. He is a visiting member of faculty at P.A.R.T.S. and has also been Guest Professor at Royal Holloway, University Of London, the Performance Studies Department of Hamburg University, the Institute for Theatre Studies at the Free University Berlin, the Koninklijke Academie van Schone Kunsten Gent, The Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at Giessen University and the Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance at Roehampton University London. 'A Choreographer's Handbook' (2010) by Jonathan Burrows is available from Routledge Publishing.

Matteo Fargion was born in Milan 1961. He studied composition with the composers Kevin Volans and Howard Skempton and after graduation played bass guitar for a time in the rock band headed by Chris Newman, a formative experience of live performance. His interest in contemporary dance began after seeing the Merce Cunningham Dance Company perform at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. This encounter encouraged him to apply for the International Course for Choreographers and Composers, where he first wrote music for dance and through which he met the choreographer Jonathan Burrows, with whom he has collaborated for more than twenty years. Since 2002 Burrows and Fargion have made a series of seven duets together which continue to tour internationally. Fargion has written music for other choreographers including Lynda Gaudreau and Russell Maliphant. Most importantly over the past fifteen years he has developed a strong collaboration with the leading English choreographer Siobhan Davies, writing music for some of her most significant recent work including *The Art of Touch* (1995), *Two Quartets* (2007), *Minutes for the Collection* (2009) and *Rotor* (2010). Fargion writes also for theatre, particularly in Germany, where he has worked over a number of years at the Residenz Theater Munich and at the Berlin Schaubühne under the direction of Thomas Ostermeier, for whom he wrote music for the prize winning 2004 production of Jon Fosse's play *The Girl on the Sofa*. His most recent commission was writing stage music for a production of Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* at the Theater am Josefstadt Vienna. Matteo is a visiting member of faculty at P.A.R.T.S.
Both Sitting or Brecht Might Have Liked It
Tim Etchells

Kind of similar-looking but for sure not identical, semi-bald blokes in identical or nearly identical clothes are sat on chairs right next to each other and doing things. Mainly it’s movement broken by stillness – a lot of hand and arm action, some of it recognisable as versions of everyday gestures, the rest of it more abstract or more dance-like. There also seems to be some interest in sound; the noise that comes when the slapping palm of a hand makes contact with a knee, or the sudden exhalation of breath when they both slump forward in a posture of exaggerated rest.

In the next piece they lose the chairs and move around instead, sometimes together, more often alone. They are pacing paths back and forth, walking circles repeatedly. With these paths and circles they make sounds; a long ‘aghhhhh’ or ‘aaaahhhhh’ for instance, which although done without noticeable emotion still invokes a notion of falling, dread or non-specific fear. Sometimes, moving down there on the black floor of the stage, they look like claymation – simple-figure-humans with a comically (or tragically) small vocabulary of action and sound. They are creatures living within a limit, two men caught in some skeletal scenario, an encounter whose pieces have been disordered, dislodged from continuity and causality.

In the final of the works they go back to the chairs and make yet more sounds – speak words and sing even. The words run simultaneously - going with and through each other, side by side, over and under, point and counterpoint. The words are mostly describing movement; movement that could possibly be dance or could possibly be something else. Run. Run. Run. Stop. Run. Run. Run. Run. Stop is all I can immediately remember. It’s fast, vivid exhilarating.

All of it messes with your sense of what’s simple and what’s complicated. Mostly it starts at a place you’d call simple, very simple, but then they pattern it zealously; repeating, overlaying, looping the sequences, moving in and out of phase with each other and altering the time so that what maybe began as something you could teach to eight year olds, ends up more like Bach. A lot of maths, a lot of counting. Strangely virtuoso, for all its insistent aura of banality.

Very often there are scores (sheets of paper) on the floor there in front of them; maps, diagrams, annotations and lists, one imagines, although it’s impossible to see them. From time to time they look to these sheets of paper. And they watch each other too. And they watch us, also. This watching – the fact and switches of their attention - is somehow the heart of the work and why I had that thought that Brecht might have liked it. The meaning lies not so much in what they do - it’s how they do it.

They’re very here and very now. They are not immersed, not absent in any deep-state-like or emotional way. They’re here very here and now and if they ever do seem lost in something for a moment, it’s no mystery, no great otherness - more that they’re temporarily perplexed or preoccupied by the sheer complexity of their task. They look absent only in the way that a man working in a builder’s merchants might retreat briefly to his own mental space when you ask him how many three foot lengths you can get from so many metres of timber.

They are in any case pretty much always following the score, so that any sense of immersion which arises temporarily is soon dispelled by their glances to it, by their faces which show for one moment the screen-saver expression of ‘counting-in-the-background’, or by their page turnings at the end of a phrase.

They are doing things (movements, sequences, actions) and as they do so, they seem to be thinking about them. If this sounds unworthy of mention I have to remember how much dance isn’t like that; how often there’s no sense of this separation between action and do-er, no sense of a person present to be thinking, no sense of thinking at all. Here though the thinking, or the possibility of it, is with us from the start, from the moment they walk on and glance to us watching. As things proceed sometimes Jonathan and Matteo seem puzzled or perplexed by what they do and at other times they’re apparently amused, but whichever or whatever their attitude is we’re always aware of them as thinking subjects just behind and inside the action; trapped by it, framed by it, living through it. It is possibly strange that two grown men are here in public doing this complicated, very rehearsed and in certain sense
quite stupid set of things, though neither the strangeness nor the apparent stupidity are things which
the work seeks to hide in any way. There’s a constant background awareness that this is a public act,
something shared. The performance is an ‘object’ brought to meet us in a particular place and time,
whose proximity and distance from us is repeatedly underlined by their flickering glances in our
direction.

From time to time, they also look to each other – so that through the task of the movement (within,
around, above and somehow in it) they attend to each other constantly. At the end or the start of some
phrase they sneak looks to see where the other one is, or take stock with each other and the ‘script’. At
other moments they simply look and wait a second or two, as if to say ‘ok’, before pressing on.
Sometimes these glances seem purely functional, unreadable almost; on other occasions they also
appear to have an explicit content. There’s the look that says ‘OK, shall we?’ or the glance that says
‘So far so good.’ Or there’s the short look that says ‘Right. Here we go..’ At still other times a glance
from one man to another will seem to pass judgment on the other or on the task itself. These are the
looks that often bring laughter, seeming to undermine the activity onstage with such delicate questions
as ‘Oh no, what’s he doing now?’ or ‘Are we really sure about this sequence, or that move?’

Raise arms. Slump forward. Sit back. Touch knees. Drag fingers back to torso. Wait. Lift hands and
then take them back to knees. Drag fingers back to torso again, and wait again.

Kind of similar-looking but for sure not identical, semi-bald blokes in identical or nearly identical
clothes are sat or stood right next to each other and doing things. It’s part game, part recited action,
part choreography, part music, perhaps part moving sculptures. In another sense the work could be
framed as a dialogue; response and reaction, moves, gestures and energy flowing back and forth as
parallel statements from one body to another. It’s a strange almost-conversation, nearly a call and
response; proposals, dead- ends and counter-proposals, all made inside a simple but shifting set of
limits.

The movement slips in and out of the recognisable – something that starts as gesture evolves or leaps
to be something else. You see yourself in it; you see other men you’ve known, a fragment of story/
situation and then suddenly nothing. The system constantly trumps narrative, containing it, cutting it
up at the same time as it summons it. What I love in fact is that the work is so abstract and at the same
time so social, so human, so readable, so much based on the people, the warmth, play, discipline and
inquiry you feel in their relationship. Its the strange and rather leveling paradox of dance perhaps, that
however mathematical it gets, there are still people there in front of you, doing it and its this paradox
that Jonathan and Matteo seem so very intent on exploring and embracing. Wait. Raise arms and lower
them. Duck down, sit back. Lift hands and then take them back to the knee.

© Tim Etchells, 2007
(This is an extract from a longer chapter - which also includes discussion of works by Boris Charmatz, John Jasperse, and Raimund Hoghe: its about the performance of masculinity in pieces that mostly aren't necessarily about masculinity)

Both Sitting Duet (2002) was a piece which Jonathan Burrows made and performed with Matteo Fargion, a composer and not a trained dancer, who has been creating music for Burrows's work for several years. Since both wanted to create and perform on equal terms, they decided that they would dance while sitting down. The movement material they devised for the piece consisted of serial repetitions of simple, everyday actions and gestures that included: reaching down to touch the floor; brushing a palm across the denim jeans covering a thigh; clapping; counting with their fingers; and making a circle by touching the tip of one finger against the tip of the thumb. The result was an abstract piece that seemed to start almost before the audience were ready for it, and finished abruptly in a 'non-ending' that lacked any conventional hints at resolution or conclusion. This makes it sound dry and minimalist, which in some ways it was; but on another level, as I will explain, it was also ironic and witty. Somewhat to Burrows and Fargion's surprise, it proved so popular that the two of them spent three years touring it around the world.

Although Both Sitting Duet was performed in silence, apart from the sounds the dancers themselves made, the material for it was developed from a late piece of music for piano and violin, For John Cage (1982) by the US composer Morton Feldman (1926-87). One dancer's material followed the piano part, the other followed the violin. Feldman, who first met Cage around 1950, composed the music for Cunningham's Summerspace (1958). Because the score of For John Cage is so complicated, Burrows and Fargion each developed their own movement scores. In performance, each had his own score, written in a notebook, open on the floor at his feet, and from time to time, one of them leaned forwards to turn a page. (note 1)

As musicologist Steven Johnson has observed, Feldman disliked 'intellectual systems and compositional rhetoric' and had a 'preference for abstract gestures set in flat "over-all" planes of time' (Johnson 2001: 649). Feldman adopted the term 'over-all' which art critics had coined to describe the way abstract expressionist and colour-field painters in the 1950s and 1960s created dissolving or dispersed compositions. Rejecting traditional, hierarchical, centrally focused compositions, these all-over paintings placed equal emphasis on paint marks wherever they were on the canvas. Cunningham echoed this idea when he observed that there are no fixed points in space. Like most of Burrows’ works, Both Sitting Duet also had a flattened, all-over quality with no development of climax, and static, but unpredictably changing sequences of actions and gestures. As Burrows told Danielle Perazzo, it is 'a piece that is moving forward all the time and remaining where it is' (Perazzo 2005: 5).

While Burrows and Fargion shared the same movement vocabulary, there was little actual unison. Instead, they often seemed to be executing the same actions slightly out of sequence with one another, or seemed to pass cues back and forth between them, or they would perform the same gesture four times together and then one would wait while the other repeated it one more time. Within the overall sameness of their material, these small variations created a subtle counterpoint between the two dancers. Feldman once explained that he used repetition as a deliberate device to disorient the listener's memory. He, thus, kept changing the number of times a particular chord was repeated so that there was no discernible pattern (Feldman 2000: 137). (note 2) Burrows told Valerie Briginshaw that, when musicians perform Feldman's score, they are always counting beats for when to come in. He and Fargion, however, had started off by simplifying these, only to find 'the reason he'd written it that way, and we had to find our own technique to break the rigidity of the repetitions and breathe life into them again' (Briginshaw 200x: xx). Feldman's uneven, unpredictable repetitions disorient the listener, making it difficult to get a sense of the piece's formal organisation, and direct attention instead to its length and sense of scale. As Johnson points out, Feldman was more interested in 'enveloping environments, in which listeners experience music from "inside" a composition' (Johnson 2001: 651). Both Sitting Duet was also somewhat like that. Because it was difficult to get a sense of its overall shape, the spectator focused more on affects generated through patterns and rhythms which varied in
terms of speed, energy, and focus.

If Both Sitting Duet was made of movement material that was unusual, and structured in an unconventional, defamiliarising way, it, therefore, posed the performers the problem of finding new ways of bringing to the audience's attention the particular qualities on which it depended. While on one level, therefore, it was an abstract work, it also became an investigation of performance as such. As Burrows told Perazzo, this level came from 'ideas about the performance and about the relationship between the people on stage and with the audience. And this other level, in a way, became the subject of the piece' (Perazzo 2005: 4).

At one performance I attended, one of the lanterns lighting the stage made occasional cracking sounds early in the piece, as it heated up, adding another, unpredictable rhythm to an already complicated pattern of choreographed events. Rather than being put off, the dancers began to smile when the lantern continued cracking, and then one of them turned his head to look at it, all without interrupting the flow of choreographed events. The enveloping ambience of the piece was hospitable and open enough to include whatever else was happening around it.

A lot of the irony and wit in the piece came from an appreciation of the open relationships across different layers of meaning that the piece generated. It is in this way that the dancers' gender, almost by accident, became significant within the piece. Many reviewers commented on their age and gender. Thus like Deborah Jowitt began by asking: 'two middle-aged men sitting on chairs for 98 percent of 45 silent minutes, moving their arms, heads, and torsos -- how fascinating can that be?' only to answer herself 'Very very' (Jowitt 2004: n.p). Jennifer Dunning in the New York Times noted that 'the men worked with an engaging air of complicity' (Dunning 2004 n.p.), while Jowitt enjoyed their delicious 'blend of everyday behaviour and ingenious lunacy'. Somehow their age and gender, together with the easy intimacy that was established through their interdependency was endearing. This was conveyed through the counterpoint between their respective movements. Burrows told Lydia Polzer that he had always assumed that counterpoint was about the tension between two parts. But Fargion had suggested to him that 'Counterpoint assumes a love between the parts' (Polzer 2004: 17). This warmth infused their execution. At each performance I attended, after a little while, individuals began to chuckle or laugh, and towards the end of the performance, the whole audience were laughing together at choice moment.

Valerie Briginshaw has written at length about the use of repetition in Both Sitting Duet. Repetition, she argues, makes one aware not only of the sameness of the thing repeated but also the inescapable difference between each individual repetition and the thing it repeats. In Both Sitting Duet, she argues, repetition actually makes the spectator aware of both sameness and differences, not only between repeated events but also between the two male performers. They are like one another as men, but the more they seem to be performing the same material in the same way, the more the differences between them become apparent. As Briginshaw points out, 'problematic, iconic images of white, middle-aged, straight males, traditionally associated with the dominant subject position, are repeated differently and transformed through the minutiae of differences that matter in the performance' (Briginshaw 200x: xx).

The openness of the piece's structure means that the audience can feel included within the evident warmth of Burrows and Fargion's relationship, particularly when spectators can share, through laughter, their appreciation of ingenious lunacy (and chance events like the lantern's cracking noises). I noted earlier Fargion's proposal that counterpoint assumes a love between parts. Burrows has suggested this idea 'gave the whole thing a gentleness and a kind of love in it which the audience feels' (quoted Polzer 2004: 17). Within this intimacy, that in part is enabled by the piece's subtle, generous counterpoint, spectators no longer see the dancers' masculinity as part of the universal hierarchy of gender. Briginshaw argues that 'the relationship between Burrows and Fargion is such that they inhabit each other's perceptual worlds' (ibid.). As I suggested in chapter two, duets, as a choreographic form, often allow spectators to project onto the relationship between the two dancers, aspects of their own experience of relating to others. From the audience's point of view, I suggest, Both Sitting Duet can gently remind them individually of the sometimes unsettling difference between self and other. One's gender is central to this difference in so far as it determines one's status in relationship to the dominant (masculine) subject position, and yet this, in itself, can never adequately
account for one's sense of one's singularity. What, I suggest, is so satisfying and valuable about Both
Sitting Duet is the gentle way it allows one to find in the relationship between Burrows and Fargion
the possibility that one's own connection with others can depend as much on one's singularity as it
does on one's gender.

-----

notes
1) The scores consisted of individual sections, each with a descriptive subtitle: lasso, twist, brush, etc.
Fargion, as a composer, used musical time signatures and notes (but no staves). Burrows has written
down a number for each count and added words or scribbles. His score was thus much longer than
Fargion's and he had to turn the pages more often. 2) Feldman has written about finding inspiration for
his interest in patterns by looking at the woven patterns in Anatolian rugs and at Jasper Johns' cross-
hatched paintings (2000: 139) which, as Johnson points out 'feature a sly balance of hidden regulation
and mundane repetition' (Johnson 2001: 651).

© Ramsay Burt, May 2006

The Sitting Duo Now Walks
or
The Piece That Lies Quietly Underneath

Daniela Perazzo Domm interviews Jonathan Burrows

Since the late 1980s, Jonathan Burrows has created dance that challenges conventional boundaries of genres and techniques, researching towards the reformulation of a movement vocabulary and the reconfiguration of the dancing body. Starting his career as a dancer with the Royal Ballet, he then developed his own work as an independent choreographer. Depicted by many critics as an idiosyncratic figure within British dance, Burrows is the author of pieces that have been seen as progressively moving towards a minimalist form of abstraction. Among their main features are the incorporation of pedestrian gestures alongside different styles and qualities of movement, the close attention to the structure of the dance and its relationship with the other elements of a performance, and a questioning attitude towards the place, boundaries and function of dance.

His recent piece, Both Sitting Duet (2002), devised and performed with Matteo Fargion, transformed Burrows’s long-standing collaboration with the Italian composer into an equal partnership, where both artists take to the stage and sit side by side to perform a movement composition based on a musical score. Three years later, the dancer and the musician are now presenting their latest work, a duet entitled The Quiet Dance. After its premiere in Munich this summer, the piece will be performed in London as part of Dance Umbrella 2005.

Daniela Perazzo: You have often said that your works are all different from each other – they are conceived in different ways, they explore different issues and concepts, they develop differently. What’s the starting point of The Quiet Dance and how have you been working on it?

Jonathan Burrows: The first thing about making a piece is that you need somewhere to begin. And if you are collaborating you need to find somewhere to begin that you and your collaborator agree upon, an itch that both feel a desperate need to scratch. In the case of this duet with Matteo Fargion, we had always had a longing to make a piece which used walking. This always seemed impossible to do because that piece belongs to minimalism. But this time we talked about it a lot, we agonised about it and we decided that it was time that we had to risk that. Partly because we wanted to make another performance together where we both moved, and walking is something that Matteo, as an untrained dancer, has; it’s his as much as it’s mine. Having said that, the odd thing is – we are now in the last two weeks of working on the performance and I got up very early this morning, I looked at the tape we have been recording in rehearsals and suddenly I was very struck by the fact that, in a way, it’s not that you see walking. It’s become something entirely of its own.

The general perception about people who make performances, or make any art, is often that we ‘choose’ an idea and then we ‘make’ that idea. But the reality is that, actually, you have very little choice, you are going to make the thing you are going to make. This was something that Rosemary Butcher taught me a long time ago. You may find one way or another to make it, but basically that’s the piece that you have in you and the job that you have is to uncover that, or discover it. And once you begin to uncover it or discover it, you have to follow what it wants. In some ways, I think of this performance now as being an attempt to make the piece that lies just underneath all the other pieces we have ever made. And that’s why we called it The Quiet Dance. But what also makes it slightly different from other pieces that I’ve tried to make is that normally I had the philosophy that the best way to make a dance is to accept that the movement that you make is in some way arbitrary, that anything is available to you, that everything is valid, and that it’s how you place it in relation to itself and in relation to what other people are doing at the same time, and how you place it in time and space that can completely shift its meaning and arrive at an unexpected and much bigger meaning than the original movement could possibly ever have suggested. But with this piece I decided, and I kind of persuaded Matteo, ‘That’s enough with the arbitrary. Let’s choose material that means something to us’.

DP: How did you get there? I understand that the creation of this piece has been a long process, which
you and Matteo started whilst you were still engaged in the tour of Both Sitting Duet.

JB: Both Sitting Duet has been touring now for three years, which was completely unexpected – we had no idea when we made it that it would be invited so much around the world. But during the time that we have been touring it, Matteo and I also decided that we would go on researching towards making another piece together. We knew this was a risk because Both Sitting Duet was so successful, but at the same time we felt that we had begun to collaborate in a way which had a clarity and an energy that we should try and build on while it was still alive. In other words, if we stopped and didn’t work together for a year or two years and then came back together, the ease with which we were communicating on the things which really concerned us would be gone. So over the past two years or so we’ve researched in different directions to try and find some way of going forward.

DP: What would you say the crucial moments of this process have been?

JB: It’s taken time and some wrong turnings to discover a way that felt right, until, in the end, we asked ourselves, ‘What is the piece that we really always wanted to make and never dared to make?’ And this piece, as I said, is the piece where we only walk. The way that we’ve approached this is to concentrate on images. In other words, not on pattern, rhythm and structure, but on very strong images, which is something I never do. I mean, there is pattern, structure and rhythm in the work, but there’s also an emphasis on the images that you see and on their impact.

DP: What do you mean by ‘concentrating on images’?

JB: I’m not entirely sure and I probably won’t know what that means until we perform it. But what I do know is that in my recent works – Weak Dance Strong Questions (2001) with theatre director Jan Ritsema and Both Sitting Duet with Matteo – the movement was arrived at from quite ‘mental’ processes. In both cases there’s another layer to the work, which comes from ideas about performance and about the relationship between the people on stage and with the audience. And this other layer, in a way, becomes the subject of the piece. Whereas with what we are doing now, I think in some sense we are daring to allow an emotional process to take place, equal to the mental process. So that’s quite ‘old-fashioned’, but that’s why it interests me.

DP: What are the images you use related to?

JB: I think the best way to put it is that for us, in some way, they are ‘elegiac’. Now, for anyone that comes to see the performance, I don’t think it looks like an elegy. It looks like what it is and it has some quite specific and odd quality, which I hope can speak to other people too. But the heart of that for us was trying to find these images that had something elegiac about them.

DP: Are they all very personal images?

JB: No, not really, because I think we have been trying – although the piece has a certain intimacy, as all the pieces that I make have – that it shouldn’t exclude other people. So something that’s too personal doesn’t open a door for an audience to come in. I suppose I would say that we were trying to look at something personal enough that it would still have a door open for somebody else watching from the outside.

I feel in a terrible disadvantage doing this interview right now because in these last two weeks of finishing the performance – and in this very moment we are trying to find the ending – almost every day I’m looking at it I see it completely differently. Some days I think I’ve caught a glimpse of what the audience would see and other days I think again I’ve caught a glimpse, but it’s completely different. And some days, of course, I worry that the audience won’t see anything at all. I feel I’m somewhere between uncertainty and certainty and I have to bide my time. And it takes infinite patience to endure the last moments of arriving at a finished performance.

DP: How did you work on the choreography? You have described the construction of the movement sequences of Both Sitting Duet as guided by very clear ‘instructions’. For The Quiet Dance the starting point was the action of walking. How did you proceed from there?
JB: It was more than that. It started from a very specific image, and it’s the first image you see. I won’t describe it because I think it should be fresh as the person comes into the theatre. But we started from one image and then we went on and made the next image that related to that one, and then the next and then the next. And then, at a certain point, when we had enough of something to get a glimpse of what we were dealing with, we began to find the ‘music’ of it. At a very practical level, the big difference between this piece and other pieces that I’ve made and that Matteo and I have made is that we have always been very preoccupied with counterpoint, meaning the relationship between one thing happening and another thing happening at the same time. But with this work we decided that we would do something slightly different. There is some direct and obvious counterpoint in it, but mainly, rather than being ‘horizontal’ counterpoint between two things happening simultaneously, there’s a kind of ‘vertical’ counterpoint throughout the piece. This seems to be about how one thing relates to the thing that came before it and to the thing that comes after it, and then when it comes back later and how that relates to what surrounds it there as well. And that’s been really fascinating for me, I have never worked that way before. Every step you take affects everything in the entire piece.

DP: Does it mean you can see some sort of linear development? Your previous works appear to be based on principles that deny linearity.

JB: To me, when I watch what we are making, it’s a piece that is moving forward all the time and remaining where it is. If you like, that’s a kind of viewpoint of life – endless change that arrives back at where it began. There’s very little movement material in the work. I’ve never been involved in a performance with so little material. And yet actually it seems to me quite rich – which is interesting. The funny thing is that every time I set out to make a new piece, I try to find a completely different starting point. That’s not really a kind of artistic or aesthetic choice. It’s just that I’ve learnt that if I try and do the same thing again, I just do it less well and I get rather inattentive and bored. And so, in order to keep on working, I’ve found this way of trying always to refresh my view of what I’m doing. Having said that, on another level, when I look at it – we recently made a DVD of ten years of films of the work made by filmmaker Adam Roberts – at some level it’s clear that I’m just always making the same piece. But it’s the same piece seen from a different angle. And I like that.

DP: Have you had any surprises, any unexpected outcomes during the process of creation of the piece so far?

JB: The surprise about this piece for me has been how working with this kind of linear counterpoint is so different from anything that I have experienced before and so tricky, and so frustrating at times, and so satisfying also, as you gradually shift things and see the work unfold and arrive at itself.

DP: Have you had any surprises, any unexpected outcomes during the process of creation of the piece so far?

JB: The surprise about this piece for me has been how working with this kind of linear counterpoint is so different from anything that I have experienced before and so tricky, and so frustrating at times, and so satisfying also, as you gradually shift things and see the work unfold and arrive at itself.

DP: What has Matteo’s role been in the creative process, especially in relation to the notion of counterpoint and to the construction of the movement sequences?

JB: With this piece, our respective roles as collaborators have been quite different from Both Sitting Duet, and Matteo for periods of time – I think he wouldn’t mind me saying this – has struggled to find what his role is, because, when it came to the movement for the piece, it’s tended to be me who’s been driving that. But there’ve been two moments in the making of the piece when suddenly the reins have been handed over completely to Matteo. And then, within the period of a week, in both instances he’s suddenly stripped things away, shaped them, extended and contracted them, the way a photographer focuses a camera. And that work he does much better than me.

DP: Has this to do with the rhythm of the piece?

JB: In some sense it’s to do with the rhythm, but it’s also to do with the fact that Matteo has more of a head for the heights of taking your time, breathing a bit slower, giving the material space and cutting holes in it. I get rather a kind of vertigo of terror that the piece would fall apart if we were to stop for a moment. And in a way that’s why the partnership works, because I’m driving and pushing and he’s calming, shaping and counselling against too much haste. And, somewhere between the two, we arrive at what we wanted, which was to use walking, to do very little and it mustn’t ever be boring.

DP: Has this to do with the rhythm of the piece?

JB: In some sense it’s to do with the rhythm, but it’s also to do with the fact that Matteo has more of a head for the heights of taking your time, breathing a bit slower, giving the material space and cutting holes in it. I get rather a kind of vertigo of terror that the piece would fall apart if we were to stop for a moment. And in a way that’s why the partnership works, because I’m driving and pushing and he’s calming, shaping and counselling against too much haste. And, somewhere between the two, we arrive at what we wanted, which was to use walking, to do very little and it mustn’t ever be boring.
Matteo to calmly execute one movement, you have frantically repeated the same pattern many more times!

JB: Yes, because under the skin I’m still a ballet man! That’s where I came from. And I have within me still that kind of visceral experience of performing all those ballets which are about giving, giving, giving to the audience in a marvellous way. And of course I also react against that, not least because I did it for thirteen years, so I earned the right to find other ways. I like the tension created between Matteo pulling and me pushing. It stops the collaboration being too nice, and when collaborations are too nice nothing happens. That doesn’t mean to say that we are horrible to each other, but we each fight hard for the direction that we see emerging.

DP: What other elements are involved in the work? You have talked about the images you started from, the idea of walking, time and space. What about the soundscape? Is there any music?

JB: Music has come in and out of the piece as we have gone along – sometimes it’s felt like it was the right thing and other times not. But we make sound and use our voices throughout the performance, so it’s not silent by any means, even though it’s called The Quiet Dance. In a way for me this title reflects something else, which is rather a celebration of that thing which unfolds more slowly and in its own terms, which is a kind of work that I have always, deep in my heart, been most drawn to. So Samuel Beckett, Tadeusz Kantor, the early Trisha Brown, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, Rosemary Butcher, Nijinska’s Les Noces, the dignity and oddity of the few handful of surviving English ritual folk dances, particularly the Whit Monday dancing at Bampton in Oxfordshire – these are the reference points for me. They are examples of a kind of work that invites you to come in and look carefully and quietly at small differences, rather than the kind of work that comes out from the stage and pushes you back into your seat. I’m not against that kind of work for a minute; as a student I was obsessed by A Chorus Line and went to see it seven times. But what has always excited me the most is that experience of being in a theatre and feeling at one with a very special moment of communication that draws me right out of my seat and down to something that’s a pin-prick.

DP: In some of your earlier works, around the mid-1990s, you showed a particular interest in how dance and music can interact with light. Does this element play a role in this new piece?

JB: That was when I was working with the marvellous lighting designer Michael Hulls and we began to find a way to work which really satisfied me, where Michael’s intervention didn’t have a cause-and-effect relationship with what was happening on stage. It wasn’t about ‘this person goes there and then that light comes on’, it wasn’t illustrating anything. He was working with time, space and rhythm in the same way that I was, and that Matteo Fargion and Kevin Volans were with music. And that’s something that somehow I’ve let slip out of my hands at the moment. That’s partly for practical reasons, because to deal with that kind of technology costs a bit more money – we had to take a technician with us, we often toured our own dance floor because we needed a very clean one, so we had to take a van, and then the whole thing becomes more expensive. In the last five years, I have been surviving quite a difficult economic climate by performing ‘out of a suitcase’, and it’s been a very conscious decision. That means, don’t travel with a technician and all the technical information has to be very simple and very clear. On an aesthetic level, it was also about needing a different way forward in terms of the feel of a performance. I was influenced by the extraordinary generation of French choreographers, and especially by Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy, and by the way that they changed everything suddenly in dance by making performances where everything was consequent and nothing could be justified by calling it poetry, which can often end up in dance as a kind of ‘empty poetics’. They are doing this by working with an incredible rigour and clarity of thinking about the thing that’s happening on stage, and this really challenged me at a certain point. So that has led me in the last few performances that I’ve made to want to really have a clear sense of what’s the relationship of a light to what’s happening in the dance. In other words, beside the practical considerations about not to be working with light, I think the other reason why I shifted away from that collaboration with a lighting designer is that I had just turned a corner and I was looking for something different, a different kind of idea of what a dance performance could be. But I really like that you asked the question because it does feel like unfinished business and something which I would be very interested to look at again in relation to what I’ve discovered now. But in this piece, the light, although it has some shape and time to it, is fairly simple, because it’s another ‘out-of-a-suitcase’ piece – perhaps the
last one, after which there will be something new.

DP: What are your plans for The Quiet Dance after it opens in Munich in August?

JB: The way that I like to work, which I’ve learnt through years of trial and error, trying to figure out how best to work the market, is that now I don’t plan a tour. Rather we are starting out with a small number of performances, in Munich, in Brussels and then in London. Usually what happens then is that a number of other promoters will come to those performances; if they are interested in the piece they’ll book it, if they are not they won’t. And you never know. If they book it, then that might mean another small handful of performances, and then some more promoters will come to see it, so it’s kind of growing ripples of interest in the work. The advantage of that for me is that it’s a quite different and richer experience to go to a venue where somebody has really desired that piece and has really made a sort of personal investment in it – and knows why it’s there, knows how to speak to the people that work in the theatre, knows how to communicate to the audience, knows the right context to put it into – than when you plan a tour of something that nobody has really ever seen, except you’ve written a lot of overconfident stuff about it, and you can often end up in quite inappropriate contexts, with an audience that doesn’t have the right situation or information as to how to sit with the performance that they’re seeing. It’s always a much more organic process for me. And if it doesn’t work, then you start again!

Daniela Perazzo wrote her PhD in Dance Studies at the University of Surrey. Her research looked at semantic strategies and the reconfiguration of the dancing body in the work of Jonathan Burrows. She is a freelance writer and editor on dance and performing arts.

© Daniella Perazzo Domm, 2005
The latest piece by Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, the last in a trilogy, closes a circle and appears to take their research to a different level. From Both Sitting Duet (2002) to The Quiet Dance (2005), and now with Speaking Dance (2006), the choreographer and the composer have gone from sitting to walking, and from quietness to speech, reinterpreting the meanings of these simple actions and conditions and, above all, deconstructing the grammar of dance and music and reinventing their relationship.

In this new collaboration, which premiered at Dance Umbrella last October, they build on their first two duets and go a step further, moving from the silence and stray sounds of their previous choreomusical compositions to create a new form of language, made of words, texts, music and folk songs, as well as of gestures, movement patterns and bodily attitudes. In fact, the ‘sitting’ and ‘quiet’ elements of the first two works of the trilogy were anything but stillness and rest; they embodied more a condition of latency, a sort of calm before the storm. So if Burrows described The Quiet Dance as the piece that ‘lies just underneath’ the rest of his work and explores what ‘unfolds more slowly and in its own terms’, for Speaking Dance he talks about a resurfacing of images and materials that played a part in the creative processes behind previous performances but didn’t make it into the final compositions. Ideas and choreographic fragments that have been haunting them and kept coming back, but never seemed justified as they didn’t fit into the clear logic of the other two duets, are now consciously allowed in and fight for their right to some space within the structure of the new work, generating a sort of implosion.

The creation of Speaking Dance feeds on this history and partly relies on the contextual knowledge of the spectators. It doesn’t necessarily presuppose an expert audience, but it certainly rewards those who, having seen the two previous works, have an understanding of them and have a sense of what might follow. As I see it, the piece meets and subverts these expectations at the same time, both responding to and surpassing the anticipation of its public.

At the start, there is the familiar entrance of the two performers in plain clothes and the short walk from backstage – understated and matter-of-fact, where relaxed and nervous body language blend into each other. They sit down on two chairs in front of the audience, in a manner that has become recognisable since Both Sitting Duet. For a moment the spectators think that, after the walking diversion of The Quiet Dance, they have now gone back there, to the ‘static’ (well, in dance terms!) position of a musical duo. The first surprise is that this time the ping-pong game is not of hand gestures but of words, although the title already suggested this – from the rhythmical repetition of ‘left’, ‘right’, ‘left’, ‘right’, or the production of chains of signifiers that could almost function as a demonstration of the Saussurean principle of the syntagmatic relations of phonemes (‘left’, ‘lift’, ‘stop’, ‘step’), to the more evocative ‘small dance’, ‘tired dance’, ‘fragile dance’, and ‘voices’, ‘silence’ which seem to tell us about the multifarious and multilayered qualities of the work and of dance itself.

But after the first ten minutes of this cut-and-thrust exercise, which feeds on the duo’s expert confidence in handling complex rhythmical sequences, the piece takes a different direction, catching unaware those in the audience who, on the grounds of the two previous duets, thought that the piece would continue in the same fashion until the end. This time it doesn’t happen. In working on the piece, Burrows and Fargion struggled with rebellious material that didn’t seem to fit into any overarching structure. After strenuously resisting breaking their loyalty to their own working principles, they finally surrendered to this intrusion and arrived at the decision of allowing the composition to be diverted and transported by a variety of impulses. As Burrows explains, ‘Matteo and I both agreed that we really didn’t have the stamina or the patience to make a third piece which held to one thing, as Both Sitting Duet and The Quiet Dance do .... So then we thought, what if we allowed ourselves much more freedom to have ideas and work on them, and make a lot of material, in music, in dance, in words and all the combinations, and just work fast and not question too much what we are doing ...? Matteo was very doubting because this is not how he works; he wanted a raison d’être to begin with, he wanted a principle; but I said, “I don’t think we have a choice. We have to let ourselves work and, at this point, we have to trust ourselves to some extent”’.

So the piece travels from the world of words to those of dance and music, with a common denominator connecting them all, rhythm. Burrows stands up and performs a dance swinging his arms and twisting his upper body, whilst Fargion sits quietly or sings Italian folk songs accompanying himself with clapping at a faster rhythm. Recorded music comes from a small stereo lying on the floor next to them, or is produced by the two performers on mouth organs played loudly and intensely. The elements that the dancer and the musician experimented with in Both Sitting Duet and The Quiet Dance are brought together here with a new confidence and the daring yet humble attitude of artists who have come to grips with each other’s discipline through years of collaboration and who, after the two previous ventures into the other’s territory, can now afford a different
Audience’s expectations are further challenged when, quite late in the piece, Fargion stands up for the first time whilst Burrows remains seated. The situation seems to signal that the roles are about to be inverted and that the musician is preparing to dance, whilst the dancer will provide the rhythmical base. But Fargion remains still, whilst Burrow recites the words ‘only in dreams did he know how to fly’. With a poetic leap, the audience can imagine Fargion’s stocky body follow his fantasy and soar. Applause and laughter marked this moment the night of the premiere at The Place, indicating that the spectators watched the performance with a certain sense of where they wanted it to take them.

Even more than in previous works, the movement and sound scores are interwoven with references and correspondences. These are both intratextual and intertextual, thus connecting together different moments of the performance or establishing links with previous works, as well as with other moments in the history of dance. Burrows says that these relationships are unplanned, they occurred accidentally: Burrows’ text on flying in one’s dreams and Fargion’s earlier chain of phrases such as ‘trying to stop’ and ‘trying to fly’, for instance. But can we still talk of a coincidence when we find out that the poetic image of the flying dreamer comes in fact from a piece of writing by Rudolf Laban? ‘We didn’t know it was Laban,’ says Burrows. ‘We just found a piece of paper stored away in a vast file of ideas months and months before, and we thought I had written it! And I knew I hadn’t, but it did sound like me, somehow: there was something about it, but that was more because it was the kind of thing that I would like. Then I looked through my bookcase and I saw the spine of a Laban book and understood it was from there! So I pulled it out and I found the extract. And it seemed very nice that, in a piece which would be about trying to visualise a dance that you can’t see, even though we do it in some way not how Laban would have intended it, at the end of the day you come back to Laban! I liked that.’

Other correspondences can be traced between this work and the two previous ones in the trilogy. There is a section that almost every critic has commented on, for its funny character of slapstick comedy: a sequence of three hand gestures accompanied by the words ‘chicken’, ‘yes’, ‘come’, written on pieces of papers which Burrows and Fargion produce from their pockets, unfold and show to the audience. The general interpretation found in the reviews is that the gestures were devised as illustrations of the words, reinforcing a predictable hierarchy between mind and body. In fact, the gestures came first and they are a quotation from Both Sitting Duet, where they are executed with no reference to chickens and calling. But since, as Gadamer says, ‘we can never escape from the fact that in our everyday experience of the world, our vision is oriented towards recognizing objects’, words were subsequently attached to the hand movements, transforming them in a form of linguistic communication. Whilst this process of reduction of perceived material to known images could be linked to dancers’ practice of giving suggestive or illustrative names to their steps in order to remember them and talk about them with the other dancers, it is also an implicit reference to the way in which the audience of Both Sitting Duet perceived and read the gestural patterns of the choreography, connecting them to objects and situations from their own lived experience. This can be linked back to the title of this new work, where ‘speaking dance’ may also refer to, in Gadamer’s terms, ‘how art unites us in its communicative dimension’ plunging us amongst ‘the profound tensions’ between ‘the wordless language’ of art and ‘verbal language’.

Coincidentally, I recently came back to a piece of writing by Douglas Dunn, reproduced in Sally Banes’ Terpsichore in Sneakers. It is titled Talking Dancing and is composed of sixteen couplets, where all lines contain different combinations of four words: ‘dancing’, ‘talking’, ‘is’, ‘not’, which form affirmative and negative, contradictory and complementary sentences on the nature of dancing and talking and on their relationship. They are circularly arranged and they go from saying that the same is the same (that is, ‘Taking is talking / Dancing is dancing’) to saying that the same is the same but in an inverted order (that is, ‘Dancing is dancing / Talking is talking’) via saying that the same is the other (that is, ‘Talking is dancing’ / ‘Dancing is talking’) and a series of negative and double negative (that is, affirmative) sentences. This text struck me for its affinity with the theme and mode of investigation of Burrows and Fargion’s work. Reflecting a posteriori on the work, Burrows talks about the peculiar relation to meaning that seems to have arisen from the way in which Speaking Dance was created. He describes it as a kind of ‘impossibility of meaning’: ‘Performing the piece now feels like we are chasing meaning but then constantly undermining it from another direction, or from another form; so if we are making music, then it’s undermined by the dance, or the dance is undermined by the words. And as we chase meaning, the piece becomes breathless, and the breathlessness arrives at a kind of ecstatic state’.

I see what he means, but I’m not convinced, and I tell him. There seems to be another meaning coming out of this act of undermining the meaning that they are chasing, a meaning that the audience seemed to have felt in a strong way the night of the premiere, when their reaction was overwhelmingly warm. I also felt wholly engaged by the piece. Being Italian, I obviously understood the folk songs sung by Fargion – lyrics that I learnt in my childhood and used to sing in the car with my parents on the way to our summer holidays – but I don’t think this was the key to the connection I felt. ‘Even if you don’t know the songs’, Burrows says, ‘or you don’t know what the words mean if you don’t speak Italian, they have the feeling of other songs, the kind of songs you sing with your family when you are a kid or something.’ And he continues, ‘but the other thing that the songs did was that
they gave this reassuring continuity in the midst of something that was kind of exploding’ – like a refrain, a recurring motif.

The folk songs are only one of the aspects that contribute to what is certainly one of the main qualities of the piece, a trait that critics have unanimously commented upon: its distinctive sense of intimacy, which gives the occasion of the performance the feeling of a friendly, informal gathering of friends. The matter-of-fact, unpretentious attitude of Burrows and Fargion during the performance, and towards the performance, is one of the defining traits of the piece, together with the open, almost collaborative behaviour they adopt in relation to the audience. As in Both Sitting Duet, but even more so in this new work, due to its freer structure, the dancer and the musician look at each other, communicate via imperceptible gestures and signals, laugh at their own mistakes and react to the spectators’ responses, allowing them to feel equally at ease. This form of sharing a space and an experience seems to me to have a lot in common with the modes and dynamics of traditional storytelling, which Walter Benjamin describes as ‘an artisan form of communication’. The craftsmanship involved in this art, which relies on the ability of the storyteller ‘to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way’, is what determines its difference from other forms of communication, which aim at delivering information or at analysing the psychological implications of an event or situation. Storytelling does not dwell on details or psychological analysis, but ‘sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again’.

The power of communication of Speaking Dance lies in the way all the material is filtered through the experience of its two performers-creators. Its meanings are constructed through the way in which the work leads the spectators to follow its numerous threads and disentangle its weave. This web plays at different levels: not only philologically, with links to previous works or within the piece itself, but also, and most of all, by establishing a connection with the spectators’ own lives and experiences. If Both Sitting Duet was ultimately about Burrows and Fargion telling the audience a story about themselves, their friendship, artistic collaboration and cross-disciplinary research, Speaking Dance seems to open the communication up and allows the spectators to see beyond the ‘story’ and its tellers, and into their own imaginative world. With its use of random words and suggestive phrases and its references to folk traditions and dreams of aerial dances, Speaking Dance speaks to the audience and makes them fly.


© Daniella Perazzo Domm, 2005
A Conversation Composed of Gestures

Both Sitting Duet, which was performed by its creators, Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, on Saturday night at The Kitchen, would likely have sent those professors and students into a tizzy. It was certainly one of the funniest and most ingenious "dances" seen in New York in a long time.

Mr. Burrows, a British choreographer and dancer, and Mr. Fargion, an Italian composer, sat next to each other in wooden chairs for nearly all of the hour long piece. They moved their arms and their feet in a silent conversation governed, it seemed, by the musical score that lay at their feet. There was no formal accompaniment, though the ambient sounds made by smacking hands and occasionally thunking feet would have probably qualified in Cageian terms. But for all the obliqueness of the piece, which had its American premiere, it communicated a good deal more than the rigors of its conception and execution.

The gestures, performed in a flowing, fast-paced mesh of rhythms and color that was comparable to notes in a traditional musical score, sometimes suggested recognizable activities like shooing pigeons. More than that, however, the men worked with an engaging air of complicity, moving in counterpoint, in unison or on their own, amusingly, like the aberrant pistons to be seen in Balanchine's 'Concerto Barocco'. They smiled slightly at times, at each other or in outward gazes across the audience. It was a bit of a shock when a clap of hands suddenly broke the silence, or when they jumped to their feet to continue, momentarily, behind the chairs. Both Sitting Duet began with a simple walk onto the stage and lowering of the house lights. It ended with the men's hands subsiding into their laps, only pausing, it seemed. For all the demands of the piece on its performers, this was clearly a conversation, without arguments or forcefully made points, to be continued at irregular moments in the onrush of life.

Jennifer Dunning
Review of *Both Sitting Duet*
Gerald Siegmund, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 5th November 2002

The radicalism of omission

Dance in the process of development: Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion perform Both Sitting Duet in the Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt.

An increasing radicalism has been making its presence felt in the work of the British choreographer and dancer Jonathan Burrows since the middle of the nineties, a radicalism that refuses to conform to all the current theatrical conventions of stage dance. In 1995 he choreographed, initially for a film, the five-minute piece Hands, which consists solely of movements of his hands on his thighs. In a performance of the piece in 1998, in the Kunstlerhaus Mousonturm Frankfurt, Burrows preceded it with the musical piece Donna Che Beve, which was played live on stage by a musician, on three cardboard boxes reinforced to produce percussion instruments. The Italian composer, Matteo Fargion, who is also Burrows current dance partner on stage at the Mousonturm, had also written the music for both pieces. Music as movement and movement as music also play a central role in Both Sitting Duet.

As in his previous major small piece Weak Dance Strong Questions, which Burrows developed together with the theatre director Jan Ritsema, his trained dancer’s body mirrors and refracts again in the body of a non-dancer. Alternately, or in unison, they perform movements that draw part of their suspense from the difference between formation and ordinariness. In fact, there is a great deal in common between the two pieces as regards the radicalism of omission. So this time too there is neither music nor a rigorous choreographic structure. Dressed in jeans and a T-shirt or a shirt, they both enter the functionally lit stage and sit down on their chairs turned slightly towards one another. Two ring binders with the relevant movement score are lying on the floor in front of them. It starts off with an elegant stroke across the thigh, a twist of the hand and a quick grasp onto the floor. Their arms brush over one another and writhe in front of their chests. Jonathan Burrow and Matteo Fargion commence at different times and with slightly modified movements until after several minutes they have developed a common rhythm, which dissolves again moments later. Seated, the two men develop in this way a closely-woven composition of movements of the fingers, hands and arms, the elements of which maintain, by their very harsh minimalism, a seemingly endless variety of possibilities of execution and combination.

In contrast to Weak Dance Strong Questions, the movements in Both Sitting Duet are rigorously executed and performed with emphasis. With lightning speed and controlled continuity they race with concentration from focal point to focal point, stopping and starting again each time, all of them climaxes in which the preceding build-up is omitted.

After half an hour there is a minor outrage within the continuum of interruptions. Suddenly, the two men grasp one another’s hands, and thus establish an unexpectedly new type of relationship with each other. Classical port-de-bras positions are slipped in, as if the ‘proper’ dance was now going to start at last. But they are simply pauses within the continuum of arm movements. At one point Burrows even lifts himself briefly off his chair, and later on even moves it a little, only to return it to its original position. Sounds are added, rhythmical clapping and a 'Hey, Hey' scan begins, with both of them counting out the fingers on their hands.

Whipped up in such a way, the evening simply breaks off after 45 minutes. Both Sitting Duet is a provocation to a dance that is continually being developed, in a pure form.

Gerald Siegmund
Review of *Both Sitting Duet*
Sylvia Staude, Frankfurter Rundschau, November 2002

*Both Sitting Duet* made by, and featuring, Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion

Jonathan Burrows has come a long way. He started out as a dancer with the tradition-bound Royal Ballet, but went on to break away more and more radically from that aesthetic scene. Whilst his penultimate dance duet, *Weak Dance Strong Questions*, was performed without music and with normal room lighting, he has now turned the minimalism screw even tighter. He and his duet partner, the composer Matteo Fargion (pictured right), sit next to one another on chairs and dance with arms and hands: the performance, which was presented in the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, is called *Both Sitting Duet*. A performance that becomes an event when, towards the end, both men stand up briefly and stamp their feet or make a rhythmic noise. How big the insignificant may suddenly seem. You can almost go into a trance if you concentrate on these arm and hand movements which are often fast, sometimes very intricate, by no means always in unison but always rhythmical and therefore amazingly exciting despite all the minimalism. Burrows and Fargion communicate with one another with brief glances, but they also have an exercise book lying on the floor in front of them in which the movement sequences are recorded in a kind of score. After 45 minutes of *Both Sitting Duet*, you wonder with quite enthusiastic anticipation how much further Burrows will take his minimalism. Presumably, he would also be able to choreograph an exciting reclining duet.

Sylvia Staude

Review of *The Quiet Dance*
Franz Anton Cramer, Frankfurter Rundschau, August 12th 2005

Shouting and squatting according to the rules

Vienna has its 'Impulstanz', Berlin the 'Tanz im August'. In Munich, the corresponding Summer Festival is called the 'Europa Dance Workshop'. They are very different in scope, but they all follow the same principle: semi-professional courses and training workshops by prominent teachers and artistes are on offer to ambitious students; in the evenings there are performances of important aesthetic positions. This year, the enterprising Munich-based organiser Walter Heun was able, by using a skilful co-production policy, to stage two distinguished first performances within the framework of the Munich Dance Workshop: The installation-like kaleidoscope *Woman and Memory* by the British veteran of post-modern dance creation, Rosemary Butcher, and two days later the enigmatically playful *The Quiet Dance* by the duo Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion.

Previously with their *Both Sitting Duet* the duo, which is composed of a former classical dancer and sought-after stage composer, had radically minimised dance to a rhythmic cadence, produced while sitting and using the possibilities of their bodies' resonance space. The sequel, *The Quiet Dance*, now launches both of them into movement. Fargion, the musician, follows the step sequences, Burrows backs this up with vocal contributions. Their 'quiet dance' consists principally of a serial eclipsing of three themes: a shouted glissando sound, a fragmentary, heavily mechanised striding dance with a downwards movement, and finally a rather ridiculous squatting position. From time to time taped bird sounds are added. From this material the two performers produce a kind of choreographic comedy: slight changes, violations of the rules and improvisations break through the structures, which have their own logic just like in a game invented by children. One believes them in all seriousness, unconditionally, yet at the same time one constantly thinks one can hear their faint giggling.

At the same time the whole piece is extremely tightly woven. The Quiet Dance is at once about playing and rejecting, about disclosing and thwarting of what is presented. One is supposed to, and is able, to understand the nature of the composition and its rules, but nonetheless one can never predict what is going to happen. The game remains spontaneous. This successful laconism demonstrates skill, and out of it emerges the confused aesthetic appeal of this quiet dance.

Franz Anton Cramer
Review of *The Quiet Dance*
Isabel Winklbauer, Abendzeitung, Munich, August 8th 2005

Slapstick – the power of destiny
Europa Dance Workshop: the first night of Burrows’ and Fargion’s The Quiet Dance in the Muffat Hall

The Quiet Dance is the title of the new choreography with which Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion are delighting their fans. Even before the first night in the Muffat Hall, there was a presentiment that the proceedings would not be quiet. It was better than that: the human voice ruled the piece.

What the intellect plans, nature knocks into shape – we know that from Laurel and Hardy, whose piano never toppled over as planned. It is the same with Burrows and Fargion: they plan movement sequences, which they perform like zealous officials but are then thwarted by intuition, which is expressed through their voices. As one performs the five prescribed steps with a turn, the other lets out an 'Aaaaah' which somehow interferes. Only after repeated practice does the kinetic masterpiece hit home. Unfortunately the aim of the two of them is to manage the whole thing in a synchronised style and, as in true slapstick manner, this simply does not work. An 'Hmm' continually changes the step arrangement, an 'Ha' produces new movements that do not fit into the concept at all.

The audience draws a great deal of pleasure from this. Like detectives, they try first of all to work out the connection between sounds and steps, yet unexpected turns surprise them, until they realise that Burrows and Fargion are doing the same thing: they are exploring the relationship between step and sound, between plan and intuition. The absurd ending thus appears full of life affirming humour, just like the endearing, clumsy movements of the men. If only all dance workshops could be so entertaining and clever!

Isabel Winklbauer
Review of *Speaking Dance*
Ramsay Burt, criticaldance.com, 2006

There were no preliminaries in Speaking Dance. The two men just walked on stage, sat down, and immediately began a duel of words 'left', 'right' 'left', 'right', 'left', 'right'... in quick succession as if chasing each other's tails. Fast, light, precise - it sounded like a tongue twister and indeed the seemingly endless, unpredictable repetitions mutated: 'left' became 'lift', and 'stop', 'step', and 'stamp' emerged. Just when I was thinking that Speaking Dance would entirely consist of speaking these rhythmically complex repetitions of words that describe movements, the performers added a short sequence that involved deftly rubbing the forearm with the opposite hand, and a quick burst of rhythmic clapping soon followed.

Other unexpected elements were added throughout the piece. Fargion sang Italian folk songs in a light, untrained but precisely modulated voice, accompanying himself with fast clapping. While he did this, he watched Burrows who danced a series of slashing and swiping movements with his arms whose spatial dynamics pulled him forwards, almost off balance.

There seemed to be cues in the movement sequence that made Fargion stop singing and start a new verse, or stop altogether. Here, as elsewhere, there seemed to be a game-like structure. There were sections of singing or speaking to pre-recorded music - on a piano, an accordion, or what sounded like a simple Cassio keyboard with drum and bass; and for a couple of short, energetic, sections they played breathlessly on small mouth organs.

On a formal, abstract level the piece used repetitions of small, largely ordinary words, actions, and musical themes to create seemingly endless yet quirky unpredictable, game-like patterns of events. On another level, the piece was very funny - or at least the Dance Umbrella audience at The Place thought so, laughing almost from the start. This is the third piece that Burrows and Fargion have made and performed together - the others pieces are: Both Sitting Duet (2002) and The Quiet Dance (2005). I guess that many of the London audience came with expectations from having enjoyed the first two pieces so much.

But what made them laugh? The silliness of these plain, simple actions, combined with a great sense of comic timing and quirky surprises accounted for much of the laughter. Some of the sequences were almost childish. One, for example, seemed to be a variant on the game 'Stone, Paper, Scissors'. When Fargion had said 'chicken', 'yes', 'come', or 'stop', Burrows had to make the corresponding hand gesture - chicken's head, thumbs up, wave forward, or open palm held up. While they are not of course stand-up comedians, the two must know they can be funny and have undoubtedly decided to deliberately exploit this. My favourite moment was when they shouted 'shake', 'flip', 'crash', and other onomatopoeic words to a well-known Bach chorale that had been recorded on a keyboard with painfully slow drum and bass.

We, in the audience, also laughed, I think, because Burrows' and Fargion's manner somehow conveyed that it was safe to do so. A number of people, writing about earlier parts of what has become a trilogy, have observed that it is lovely to see two men relating so warmly together on stage and displaying such generosity towards one another. This is clearly partly a result of their working practices. Burrows is a dancer while Fargion is a composer. Each of the three pieces has explored different ways of allowing them to perform together on equal terms despite their different abilities. Both Sitting Duet took as its starting point the score for a piece for piano and violin by Morton Feldman, each dancer performing movements set to one of the instrumental parts. They had decided that both would sit for the entire piece because this reduced the range of movement possibilities in a way that made the gap between Burrows' and Fargion's dance experience less significant. Each had a score written in a notebook which they followed while performing Both Sitting Duet and Speaking Dance. Dancers usually learn the whole piece, however long, by heart, whereas musicians invariably use scores. Fargion had had to perform The Quiet Dance from memory without one. The piece was, of course, far from silent, with both performers singing or counting through sequences of unpredictable repetitions. In Speaking Dance Burrows had more dance-like material while Fargion did more singing and playing of music. There was also a musical game sequence where the dancers listened to a piano melody and
had to choose to sing a note from it while naming it - 'A flat', 'B flat', 'C', 'D', 'E flat', etc.

Unpredictable repetitions are a feature of all three pieces, coming from Burrows and Fargion's long-term fascination with Morton Feldman's music. Feldman's uneven, unpredictable repetitions disorient the listener, making it difficult to get a sense of the piece's formal organisation. They direct attention, instead, to its length and sense of scale. Feldman was more interested in enveloping environments, in which listeners experience music from 'inside' a composition. I often seem to start off watching Burrows' pieces by trying to work out what the rules governing the composition are; but when I have given up, because these are never clear, I find myself becoming absorbed in the piece's overall ambience.

In the post-show discussion, Burrows suggested that now all three pieces have been made, they have realised these have a surprisingly classical musical form. The first introduces a set of premises, the second is a slow and meditative exploration of possibilities introduced but not addressed in the first, while the third is fast and sums up the themes and ideas from the first two.

When asked what his influences are, Burrows named an Oxfordshire Morris dancing team and a piece Gestures in Red that Douglas Dunn performed at Riverside Studios in the first Dance Umbrella Festival back in 1978. This piece totally divided the audience - some walking out, one after loudly calling it a load of rubbish, others sticking with it and applauding strongly at the end. (What Burrows didn't mention was that he himself, at the time dancing with the Royal Ballet, had also performed an early piece in that first festival.)

It is a mistake to think that conceptually challenging or innovative works like this trilogy deliberately go out of their way to contradict conventional expectations for the sake of it or in order to be fashionable. Work that pulls one out of one's comfort zone can make one aware of ideas and experiences one wouldn't otherwise encounter. Burrows and Fargion are mature, thoughtful performers with enormous experience. There didn't seem to me to be anything self-indulgent about Speaking Dance. Much of it looked tricky to do at the fast, energetic pace they set themselves. Some sections seemed to have an almost strained intensity that I found strangely moving. Burrows and Fargion seem to have got in touch with some basic and fundamental truths about relationships - between each other and between themselves as performers and us in the audience. This is what, in my view, makes Speaking Dance such a fine work.

Ramsay Burt
Review of *Speaking Dance*

Little dance but lots of charm

Anyone reading with a mobile to hand should dial The Place box office and buy a ticket for Speaking Dance, if they’re still available that is.

Chances are, this funny, clever, ingenious miniature has sold out, despite being a polytonal nonsense chant by two middle-aged men sitting on scruffy old chairs.

No dance? No music? Well a bit, but it's mostly a thing of indefinable charm. It begins and ends with choreographer Jonathan Burrows and composer Matteo Fargion sitting on a plain stage. They recite words and phrases in a rhythmic game of hide and seek, the words describing both movement (jump, stretch) and its quality (slow, high).

Burrows and Fargion literally speak dance - you hear what dance looks like. The impish pair echo, mimic, and chase each other's phrases, they shift emphasis and volume, and then counterpoint the other's intonation. They say aaahhh and grunt and whistle, and then clap and rub their hands.

Absurdist self-indulgence, you'll be thinking, but what you see is revelation and joy. It's also the third, and possibly last part in their trilogy exploring the shifts and links between dance and music. The duo are under the Radar, but light years ahead.

Sarah Frater

Review of *Speaking Dance*
Anne Williams, Ballet Magazine, London, October 2006

By now we ought to be accustomed to the surprises the wry, spry and elegant pairing of Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion keep springing on us, but somehow we’re not; they’ve always got an extra rabbit in the hat to take us unawares. With Speaking Dance there’s a whole family of baby rabbits in that roomy hat.

Opening, they take their places on their accustomed chairs and without ado begin a fast, rhythmic dialogue consisting of the alternate words ‘Left’ and 'Right' which, just as we’re drawn into their juicy, danceable rhythm, they vary with different words –'come on’, come up’ etc; the rhythm builds, they add numbers to the words and begin clapping. Memories of Reich’s Clapping Music piece intrude here; in fact the whole pacing of their spoken words is as subtle and complex and probably as difficult as that famous piece, though Burrows and Fargion make it look easy. Throughout, the pair – soberly dressed and middle-aged - mirror each other’s movements exactly, a sort of seated, mumsy, corps de ballet.

The pace changes when Burrows – a trained dancer – stands up and to the accompaniment of Fargion’s sung words (presumably in Italian, but I wasn’t convinced), begins to move his arms in a solemn and comical approximation of the sort of movement we get from Forsythe, complete with blank yet knowing facial expressions. Piano music kicks in and the men begin to repeat the word ‘love’ with increasing speed, then pick up harmonicas and begin to blow them, not inexpertly. The highlight comes when the men start to chant something about a chicken, Burrows matching the words in exact time with rapid, rhythmic hand gestures, including a fleeting impression of a chicken opening its beak. You had to be there.

As much fun as this show was, nobody could have been unaware of the considerable artistry and musicianship underpinning it. Burrows and Fargion are two gifted and exceptional artists, and they’re probably unique. We need to treasure them.

Ann Williams