

INTERVIEW

Beat poet Derrick Brown over zijn samenwerking met Noord Nederlandse Dans: "No one has ever seen this kind of collaboration before."

door Rob Kasteleijn

Voor zijn choreografie 'Strange Light' werkt artistiek leider Stephen Shropshire samen met Derrick C. Brown, een van de belangrijkste hedendaagse Amerikaanse beat poëts. Brown treedt wereldwijd op en creëert met behulp van muziek, spoken word en soms zelfs magie de meest verbluffende acts.

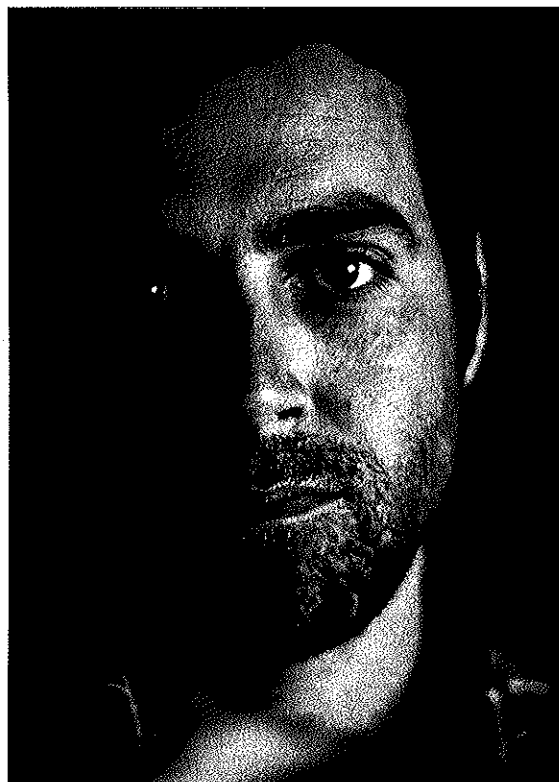
I know the word 'beat poet' (from people like Kerouac and Ginsberg) but at the same time I was wondering: what exactly is a beat poet?

"Literally beat poets are bohemian hedonist writers who emerged after World War 2, who are into alternative sexuality, hippie love and hard drugs, writing with a confusing exuberance and jazz musicality in their delivery. They were spontaneous wordsmiths who made the publishing world more liberal. Disco kicked their ass and they faded away. They weren't connecting with people beyond snapping fingers and smoking their egos. Thank God that died. I am not any of those things described above. I am also not a slam poet or a hip hop poet.

But here is the thing: there are certain titles which folks use because those titles are understood. I am a writer who believes poetry is for the working class, for the excited, for the horny and sensual. I believe it needs to make sense, even if it is surreal. I believe in editing and crafting poems because the audience deserves it. I believe good poetry has unique power and influences those who hear it and those who write it in a way that makes them slow down and consider earth and the heavens and the miracle of cold beer. If I could remodel the phrase beat poet to mean beat to hell and not quitting, then I am that kind of new beat romantic."

The poem you wrote for 'Instrumental' lasts for 30 minutes. And is the choreography based on the poem? Or are words, choreography and music influenced by each other?

"It was an hour. When they asked me to write it I said "sure, I can do that no problem." We then trimmed it down to be about 30-40 minutes. I love a good challenge. Once the written piece was cleared I called upon two amazing conductors, Timmy Straw and Emily Wells to write all the music. It was then recorded on my boat with my voice over the music and sent to Stephen Shropshire. He made a few suggestions and we tweaked



it to be righteous. He then choreographed the hell out of it and is still cranking away because that's how he rolls."

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Who came up with the idea to work together? Did you and Stephen Shropshire know each others work?

"Stephen had an old book of mine and wanted to do a short dance piece to one of the poems from 'Born In The Year of the Butterfly Knife'. I agreed emphatically after I saw the group perform in New York. He had the idea to write an epic poem for a whole troupe to dance to and I asked if I could do a poetic story that was funny, pulled at the gut and heart and also unveiled some sort of beauty about being alive. I told him I didn't want to be confused by 'high art', whatever the hell that is. He agreed and I slaved over this sucker for three months. This piece is for the people... and the music and movement each make it the most ambitious and wonderful thing I have ever worked on. It is an autobiographical piece about light being born.

What excites me about this piece is that no one has ever seen this kind of collaboration before, not in the States, not in Holland, not in Narnia. I truly believe it will open the door for people who don't necessarily like going to see dance, poetry or theatre. So hooray for Noord Nederlandse Dans for taking huge chances that are going to break ground and ripple through the entire art world for years to come."

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