

- How did you prepare danceWEB?

Once it was clear that I was going to work with the WEBbers as Mentor in 2014, I started off by gathering information from people who've known and led the program for a while now. First and foremost, of course, I got in touch with Rio Rutzinger and Hanna Bauer, as well as former mentors and other members of the team. The deeper I probed, the more I realized how strongly this program - and in direct consequence my functions as a coach - builds on very open structures, focusing on giving the WEBbers the best imaginable guidance in their individual training. I quickly discovered how tricky it is to be preparing for a program which, unlike a course or a masterclass or a research project, does not aim towards a common goal, but is based solely on the individual needs of the artists who take part.

On the one hand you don't yet know the people, on the other there's this necessity to find some kind of ongoing thread, a kind of working order, to structure the 5 weeks of time you're going to spend together. Not a small challenge, after all we're talking of 64 different artists from approximately 40 nations, each of them with their personal needs and approaches to work. Then again, that's what the concept behind it was all about: to highlight the heterogeneity of contemporary dance. So, leading up to the program, I tried to make use of my experiences working with larger groups and, together with David Wampach, prepare at least the first couple of days in Vienna accordingly.

Which not only meant to lead the Webbers out of any shyness working with such a large group of colleagues, with whom they're about to spend some intensive times, as well as to confront them right from the start with different demands, but also to synchronise this very individual group. In accord with co-mentor David Wampach we prepared various models of group dynamics, but also discussed which artists to invite to present different artistic approaches, as well as an outside view on the Middle-European art-scene. We ended up inviting Jakob Lena Knebl, Erwin Wurm, Alain Platel und company, Cecilia Bengolea and Francois Chaignaud to give talks.

I was told by a few afterwards that coping with these different positions at the beginning was almost too much for them. Others, however, very much appreciated it. To me it was important to give them a glimpse of the way of working and living of established artists from right at the beginning. For Middle-European participants there may not have been many surprises, but very well so for Webbers from Iran, Thailand, Tanzania, Mexico, Taiwan, etc.

Logically it was difficult to stand out individually from such a large group (we rarely managed to break out of the lecture-situation in those meetings), but we placed much importance into developing a base for later discussions in small groups straight away. Therefore we also had the Welcome Party at my Studio on Laxenburger Strasse, so the international guests could catch a first view of the local dance scene.

- How did you select the WEBbers? What were your criterias?

DanceWeb is open to everybody. The program is internationally very popular with professional dancers and the numbers of applications are accordingly high. Luckily we had a very enthusiastic and reliable team who, based on our discussions, carried out the pre-selection. My own priority was mostly to invite artists who already realized productions themselves, choreographers who stand out, not merely through the quantity of their work, but through their individuality in the way they deal with certain topics. I wanted artists who see dance in connection with other contemporary forms of art, artists who have an effortless approach to visual art, literature, media art, electronic music, or

contemporary theater. In this aspect I found it quite helpful to, not just look at their cover-letters and references and applications but also check their own media presence (youtube, vimeo, etc.) Despite the pre-selection we were left with a couple of hundred applications. You can imagine how hard it is to choose from so many great proposals. In hindsight I was very proud of the selection, because most of the participants turned out to be as interesting as they presented themselves. We also wanted to support artists from countries where dance maybe doesn't have quite the popularity, while at the same time the amount of participants we could choose from countries with many applicants (e.g. Germany) had to be limited. My research was quite thorough, but also very informative to me, since I was able to learn a lot about the scene in the different places, and was sometimes quite surprised about the activities in some countries where I hadn't quite expected to find such intensity. At the end of the day one can naturally only come up with a subjective choice, some wonderful candidates who, I'm sure, would have deserved to take part, went unnoticed. I nonetheless want to affirm Rio and support this individual mode of selection because not only does it look at the education and success of the applicants, but also at their creativity, originality, talent and power of persuasion.

- Why did you choose to invite a co-mentor?

For me it was clear from the beginning that I, too, wanted to learn from my role as coach. From the exchange with the WEBbers, but also through the exchange with somebody whose artistic work I find interesting. Rio Rutzinger affirmed me not to ask somebody I've known for ages to be co-mentor, but maybe to collaborate with somebody I don't yet know at all. David Wampach, to me, was that kind of person. I only knew one of his earliest pieces and, then again, saw his latest piece at Impulstanz last year. Both performances held a unique kind of fascination for me. I was able to see approaches I also find in my own work, but also a vast amount of differences which I was only able to grasp partially. But I guess it was exactly these differences that kindled a fascination, the origins of which I wanted to explore. After my suggestion had been accepted by the team and after a first meeting in Paris, my gut feeling that David was the optimal person for the job was confirmed. David was also up for it straight away and agreed to take part. Of course we had to synchronise at first, as it was becoming obvious that we'd have to put our own artistic work, which we are used to express ourselves with, on the backburner and come up with a shared structure that still allows the necessary freedom. As I said, we didn't know each other, but wanted to act as a team. Looking back at it I believe that we complimented each other well and were even able to turn the odd disagreement into triggering open, work-specific discussions.

- What were for you the positive and negative points of sharing the mentoring with a co-mentor?

With a group this size sharing the workload is certainly a positive thing. And, even if the individual talks with the WEBbers were not made use of by them as much at the beginning as towards the end, it was nonetheless an advantage for them to have two different people to talk to. I think that our presence alone gave the Webbers a sense of unity, while at the same time showing diversity through our different positions. We got quite positive feedback on that from a few Webbers who appreciated our differing views. At first I thought that these differences might cause some problems, but it turned out to rather enrich the artistic discourse among us all. We both also have quite different

personalities. But that led to David having a good rapport with Webbern I maybe wasn't able to reach that well. We regularly got together to exchange experiences and reflect on our observations. For me this was very enriching, for the larger part it confirmed also my opinions.

I am used to lead larger groups on my own and to make necessary decisions by myself. David was a big help for me in leaving structures open, to not always plan or to just let certain group-dynamics happen - to withdraw and just observe. Which, on the one hand, did lead to long discussions at some group meetings, on the other hand it gave everybody the feeling, to have been involved in in the decisions. I was very surprised over the results from these meetings, especially the willing contributions from the Webbers.

- How did you feel the connections with the WEBbers?

As I've already said, we consciously chose artists who work very indepently but also in very different ways. You can't, and actually don't want, to reduce such plurality to a common denominator. Naturally the connection with, and sympathy towards, was better some with Webbers than others. I knew that we all had to spend this time together, because ultimately we had selected them. This means they not only visited numerous events, workshops, research projects, etc. together, but also shared their accommodation, discussions or the so called "Dance Web Salon" where their pieces were presented. Naturally some cliques formed, which in turn quickly led to smaller collaborative projects. I always had the feeling of a prevailing mutual respect, even if artistic approaches and methods sometimes differed vastly. I would even go as far as to say that there was an amicable conversational climate all the time, allowing for even some heated topical discussions to take place. This climate of openness was the ideal fertile ground for the group to start organising itself, i.e. the Garage X, which Impulstanz gave us for the whole duration, got used more and more, to try out ideas, to hold discussions, to rehearse or present new works. David and I were able to take ourselves back more and more, without losing touch with the Webbers. Also not to forget the events which the Webbers organised outside the actual festival, (e.g. out of Keith Hennessy's workshop "Queer Shamanic Potential").

The most intensive thing was dealing with those willing to take part in the one on one talks. At the beginning David and I had to search those talks, but over the course of the festival this started to change and by the end I had had some more or less individual exchange with everybody.

- In retrospect, do you think that you did it well?  
Or if you had to change something, what would you do?

Of course we tried to give our best. And there's always something you know better in hindsight. The idea to use Frogs (i.e. participants who had already taken part in DanceWeb in previous years and who gave a lot of support in organisational, as well as topical matters. In our case we had Miguel Angel Guzman and Idil Kemer join us) is essential.

I could even imagine that Frogs could be used as co-mentors, since they experienced the structures and course of the program themselves and can set practical accents. A big shortcoming is the small amount of shared time we have for DanceWeb. I'd have wished for more time to spend on discussion groups or research. I think the problem that Webbers enlist in as many courses as

possible, and thus constantly have to race across town, so that on weekends - when there are plenty of Dance Web events, they'd actually need some time off, is generally known. I was actually surprised that everybody showed up almost all the time.

The possibility to use the Theater Garage X exclusively for Dance Web over the course of the whole festival was a great gift to everyone involved, even if it only was made full use of towards the second half of the program. We should have informed the participants up front about this opportunity rather than confront them only after their arrival. I am sure, had we done so, a few would have used the theater through the first half, which would in turn have brought on some more efficient work.

Most exciting, to me, was the last section of the program where we also had use of the whole Arsenal and where we organised our various own events. One afternoon certain headlines for topics at hand were written onto paper and placed into various spaces at the Arsenal. Everybody was free to swap groups. Very lively goings-on and very inspiring discussions.

The following days a few offered workshops, others got together to improvise and others again worked on ideas developed in the workshops and reported their experiences. The opportunity to present their own works was used by around 11 Webbers at the first Salon in Garage X. The second DW Salon we had to repeat twice because of the huge number.

At the end there was a huge wish within the group to keep in contact. Instead of one, large superimposed platform, many small ones emerged - something I find more efficient as far as topics are concerned.

Looking back DW was obviously a great adventure for all of us, with many highs and only few lows, with intensive experiences and artistic questions, that I'm very grateful for and which I wouldn't want to miss. I am proud to have been able to mentor these 64 international dance artists together with David for, at least, a short while.