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An Interview with Nicola Hepp: A Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival Winner

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, February 14th, 2018

Over the next several weeks *ScreenDance Diaries* will be featuring articles on winners from this year's (round two) of **Dare to Dance in Public Film Festival**. I gave each filmmaker a list of questions to ponder, so we could understand more about their film, focus, and process. This year's winner for Best Choreography Award was *The Double*, a film directed by Nicola Hepp. The film, which heralds from Amsterdam, was an early entry and immediately pulled us in with its short, powerful, leave them hungry for more aesthetic. What follows is what Nicola had to say about her film:

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SE: *How did you come to make this film? What were the inspirations for, and/or ideas behind it?*

NH: I had been thinking about this idea of a man meeting his alter-ego for a long time. Many years ago, I read the short story "The Double" by Fyodor Dostoyevsky and it has lingered in my mind ever since. A lot of my work deals with doppelgängers or alter ego's, time, and unexpressed possibilities.

As a teacher at the Amsterdam College of the Arts, I'm always curious as what my dance students are busy with and they often inspire me. In this case, the young choreographer Dalton Dangelo Jansen had been working with two dancers on a duet and I pointed out to him how in a sense they were very much alike. Dalton allowed me to mix and match the movement material from their duet to adapt it to shooting *The Double*.

SE: *Tell us a little about your history and background with dance and/or film, and which medium you are most involved in:*

NH: My background is in dance. I was trained and worked as a dancer but was always choreographing and imagining stories. Since 2006 I hold a master in Choreography and New Media (Video) from the Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten. I have worked with video as an integral part of live dance performances since 2003. In particular my fascination with being up close to the performer and seeing the movements from a different angle made me embrace the use of the moving camera... directing the eye of the spectator and attempting to make visible the invisible.

SE: *Do you follow Screen Dance as a genre?*

NH: I do as I find it to be an exhilarating genre, the moving image and in particular movement on screen.

SE: *Is this your first dance film?*

NH: My first dance film, *Echo*, was conceived in 2013. While working on it, everything fell into place. Screen dance is really where I feel that all my passions can be combined to create a story, a visceral film, a moving image in more than one sense. And where my knowledge and expertise can also come together to create an engaging piece of work.

SE: *When you approach a dance film project, do you have a pre-existing idea for a form, or do you let the footage shape the project? How much of your project is shaped in editing?*

NH: It depends on the project. I always have a pre-existing sense for the feeling of the film, for the concept of what the film is. And I also have certain ideas about how it will be edited, which in turn affects what needs to be shot. However, I also love improvising on set and may therefore end up with some surprising material, that often makes it into the edit. For *The Double*, I knew more or less what kind of shots I wanted because I felt that the edit needed to be quite quick and rhythmical. For another film I made, the idea beforehand was clear, but the images needed a slightly different approach. I believe it is crucial that you are able to also let go of your expectations and look at what the footage is actually saying. Even if that means something else than what you set out to make.

SE: *What moves and inspires you most about the intersections of dance and film?*

NH: I'm very interested in the choreography for the camera. The cameraman and the camera becomes a character/ or a dancer if you wish. The way the camera moves in relation to the dancers is to me just as important as what the dancers or performers are doing. Being able to tell a story with images and movement and to reach people who might not go to see a live dance performance. Directing and choreographing is a very similar process to me.

SE: *What are your plans for festivals and/or distribution with this film?*

NH: *The Double* was screened at several festivals around the world, most recently apart from being part of Dare to Dance, at Breaking 8 festival in Italy and Miami Screendance festival in the US. Next up is Tiny Dance Film Festival in San Fransisco in March.

SE: *What kind of audience reactions has your film received?*

NH: In the words of artist and curator of the Screendance Festival Breaking 8's Alessandra Pisu: "A film about unexpressed possibilities, roads not taken, epiphanies, revealing glimpses; and that old fear, of meeting in person- someday-somewhere- the person we could have been."

SE: *Is there anything else you would like to share?*

NH: *The Double* was completed within 36 hours. I got everyone together and found our location for the shoot. Then it was a matter of extracting the parts of the original duet that I wanted to use for *The Double*. We shot the film in just over 2 hours with cameraman Adnan Hasovic. I had a

clear idea about the walking scene in the beginning and a sense of what kind of shots were needed for the rest of the film. A lot of the angles and shots were then improvised, with Adnan moving with the dancers and filming handheld, following my directions on the spot. The next day, after some hiccups in importing the material into the computer, I edited and graded the film. We made our deadline :)

Finally: I'd like to say thank you for organizing... I feel very honored!

We feel very honored to have Nicola's entry! Please take a moment to enjoy: ***The Double***.

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