

**This is a Letter to the Iceland Dance Company and to the performance *Romeo and Juliet – Up Close\**. All letters are love letters, but beyond being a love letter this is an urgent call for *romance and deep internal sincere art* in the current times of political, ecological, and economical horror. This is also the report of my study visit.**

*This is for everyone who dances for compassion and justice,*

Felix said, in the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*. The prologue is tightly choreographed; each sentence is scripted, the dynamics are thought through, the exit signs are shown, and the narration of Shakespeare is teased with. Within all those parameters and structures Felix still speaks honestly and sincerely. The performance hasn't even started, and I find my heart dripping, just like the led-lighted one on the back wall of the stage.

*This is for everyone who dances for compassion and justice*

crystallizes *Romeo and Juliet* and my perception of the Icelandic Dance Company. It is an institution that defies all expectations of an institution, a company where you can find the artistic director Erna Ómarsdóttir skipping rope and cleaning floors during and after rehearsals. It is heartwarming to encounter experienced female/nonbinary choreographers in positions of power who have a strong background in dancing and performing themselves. The inside eye is as important as the outside eye, and Erna meets the dancers as colleagues in the studio and on the stage.

Ballet is at the core and at the ridicule of *Romeo and Juliet* and I think I have finally found my response to *why ballet, still?* Ballet is to dance what Shakespeare is to theatre. Stiff, historical, overused, recycled and irresistible when executed well. The dancers don't only execute the ballet repertoire, they live through it as if they would've done it since they were born (which isn't too far from the truth) acknowledging its visual value and romantic potential. But ballet in itself is not enough, and ballet, is not what makes this piece necessary.

What makes this piece truly romantic is the generous sharing of the inside lives of the dancers happening simultaneously with rhythmically and spatially disciplined town meetings, stage fights, cleaning sessions and seances. All tricks are used, and they are used well.

*Love is in the air, fake butts and breasts, motherly instincts, heartbreaking roars, whispered words of wisdom, wind machines, pop-songs, wigs, pompoms, lifts and staged deaths go hand in hand with the pompous tunes of Prokofjev. Split seconds of rage, heartbreak, acrobatic tricks, pussy-grabs and carefully caresses. With its blood dripping, *Romeo and Juliet* reminds me of life. It feels like waking up in a pond of my own period blood next to a stranger or*

*waking up on a grass field next to my best friend or waking up on the pave way when biking too fast too far in the night. And now I know, that when the apocalypse arrives, no matter if it comes as war or an overflowing sea, we open our groins and we howl and clap and scream pussy destroyer and we run into the devil dictators or hide in the bushes, together. And in the morning, we braid ourselves into a pile and softly sing songs of love and loss to all of our admirers. We flirt and we hold hands and we jump high and crawl to find a nest to rest.*  
*We grieve and we love, we grieve and we love.*

Throughout my study visit I have been practicing the position of the observer. I found my tired face in the mirror of a dance studio in the City Theater of Reykjavik on March 5<sup>th</sup> at 9 in the morning. Holding on to a ballet bar for my dear life, trying to remember in which order the plié-positions are to be executed, I realized that I am exhausted. I arrived at Reykjavik with a suitcase full of dirty clothes as I had spent yet another night scribbling an application and an essay, edging their deadlines. For the past *years*, I have been running from rehearsals to seminars to boxing classes to teaching to choir practice to performances and now I had three weeks of just watching other people work. Due to this sudden arrival and change, I felt at times restless (and of course got a raging urinary tract infection) but it was also a relief to be useless and to get to see everything from the outside.

I haven't realized before, that you really see *everything*. I think my favorite moment was when the rehearsal director Kata Ingva walked around the stage before a run-through holding three rubber hands in her hands, repeatedly asking *does everyone have their hands? Does everyone have their hands ready? Where are your hands, behind the stage?* What a blessing to get to witness something so whimsical and absurd, yet practical and caring. (And what a perfect scene, I might use it later.)

I love my chaotic life back in Helsinki, I love the art collectives and communities that we have built, and I don't know if my hips could handle daily ballet classes, but I do still romanticize how the dancers in the company only get to focus on the dancing and the performing. And how they do it with such commitment and detail and care for the dances and each other. All the dancers in the company, old and new members, were gorgeous and precise on stage.

So of course, I still secretly dream of being a *Company Dancer*; but during this visit it has become clearer to me that my expertise nowadays lies elsewhere; I thrive in the sporadic and hard floored and dirty freelance field. But from there I can every once in a while call some inspiring institution and ask; *Hello, can I visit?* And hopefully they will welcome me with as open arms and hearts as the staff and dancers at the Iceland Dance Company.

*Thanks for having me. Hopefully we meet again, in Reykjavik, in Helsinki, or elsewhere.  
Please don't hesitate to write, I would be happy to hear from any of you.*

*till then,*  
Corinne

\* the performance *Romeo and Juliet – Up Close* is choreographed by Halla Ólafsdóttir and the artistic director of Iceland Dance Company Erna Ómarsdóttir. The performance is performed by: Bjarney Elín Hauksdóttir, Elín Signý Weywadt Ragnarsdóttir, Erna Gunnarsdóttir, Félix Urbina Alejandre, Eydís Rose Vilmundardóttir, Inga Maren Rúnarsdóttir, Luca Pinho Seixas, Saga Sigurðardóttir, Sarah Fisher Luckow and Shota Inoue.

Find all credits and performance description here: <https://id.is/en/romeo-juliet-up-close/>