

Presentation for Janice Parker Projects and The Saltire Society's Dance Artist Bursary

Hello!

I'm Aby Watson, I'm a Glasgow based artist, facilitator and PhD researcher working in performance and choreography. Late last year, I received a Janice Parker Projects and Saltire Society Dance Artist Bursary to support the development of a new solo dance performance. I'm going to talk about my work with the bursary and then will show you a video of the work in progress.

It's important for me to note, I'm dyslexic and dyspraxic as I feel these identities are at the core of who I am as a person and are at the heart of the work that I make. The performance that I have been developing with this bursary is specifically exploring dyspraxia, in relation to dance and choreography.

I should probably tell you a little bit about dyspraxia if you're unsure what it is- I know there's some dyspraxic people in the room, who will be total experts, but it's good if we all start on the same page. So, dyspraxia has been defined as: 'a delay or disorder of the planning and/or execution of complex movement' (Colley, 2006:13), which basically means that there's a difficulty with planning and doing movements and actions. Dyspraxia can also affect how a person organises themselves and their thoughts, the efficiency of their movement, their memory, their processing speed and how 'clumsy' they are: dyspraxia is commonly understood by levels of clumsiness.

As I'm a dyspraxic person and a dance maker, it's clear that some problems may arise, and in the past, they have. I have found traditional dance classes exceptionally difficult but began to follow avenues of practice where I do succeed and on my own terms, in my own way. I'm passionate about exploring dyspraxic qualities within dance and movement and understanding them as creative potential: not problems.

What did I apply to do?

So, this is where I was coming from with my application. I applied to develop a solo performance called '*One way or another*' which has now evolved to be called '*-ish*', This solo performance aspires to move away from the virtuosity of traditional perceptions of contemporary dance, and tries to communicate a choreographic language that is unique to the brain and body processes of dyspraxia. This performance seeks to explore the limbo space I feel dyspraxia inhabits, as it is an invisible difference that doesn't sit easily in the traditional Medical Model dichotomy of able/disabled.

In order to develop this work with a perspective of dyspraxia that wasn't just centred on my own experience, I sought to bring together a group of local dyspraxic people to move and create together. I aimed to facilitate inclusive workshops where an entirely dyspraxic group could explore what movement and choreography comes from their dyspraxia. I intended to take those findings into my solo choreography for the final

performance. However, these workshops became the base and body of my bursary and were an incredibly illuminating experience.

What I did

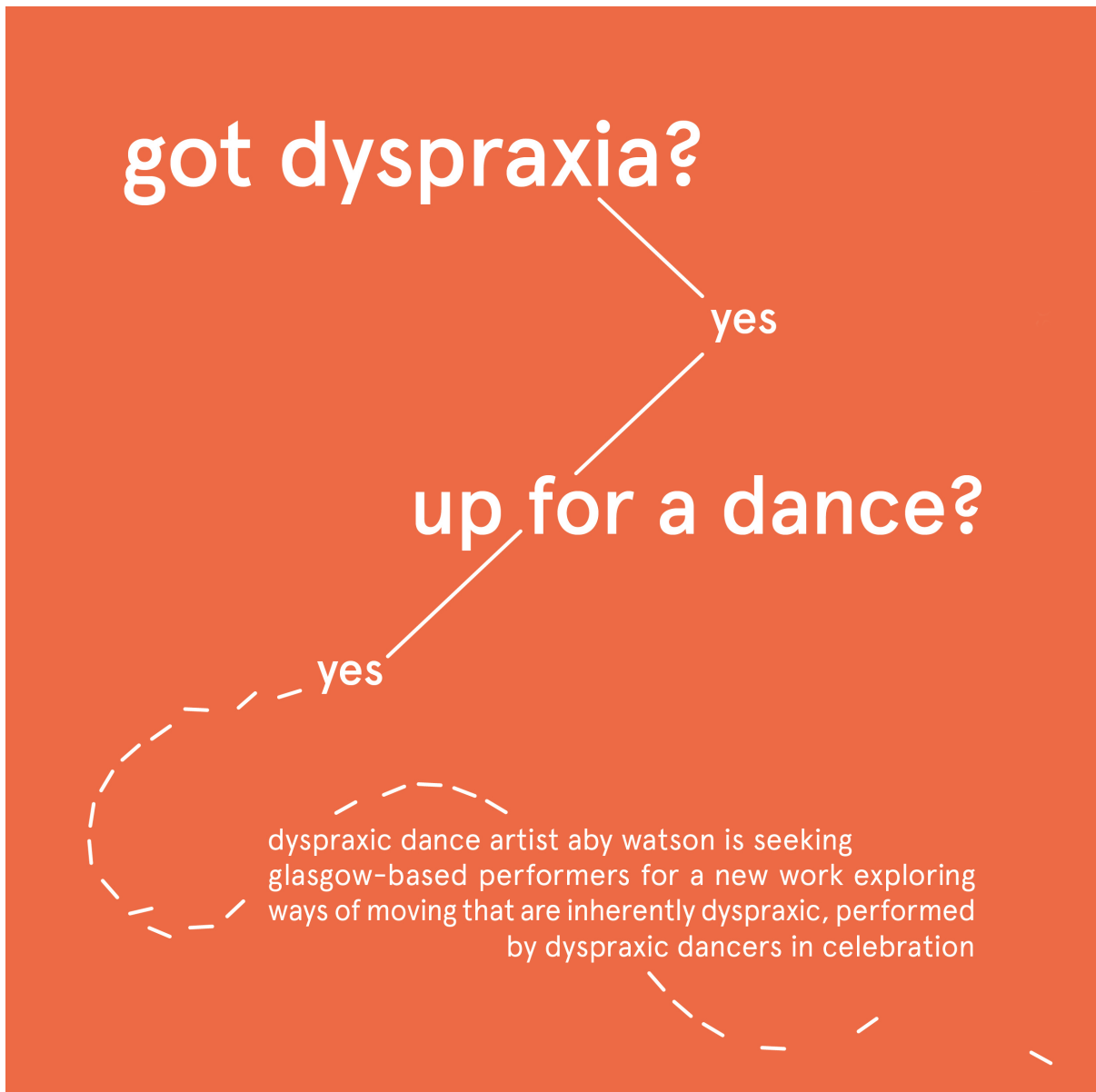


Image by Molly-Mae Whawell and Kat Loudon

Along with my collaborators on this project, creative producer Daisy Douglas and visual artist Molly-Mae Whawell, I put out a public call-out for dyspraxic people who may be interested in exploring their relationship to dance, movement and choreography. The only requirement being that they identify as dyspraxic, it didn't matter to me whether they had a medical diagnosis or not.

We had around 13 responses from different types of people, ranging from a professional choreographer to a pie maker, and a range of ages from an 11 year old school pupil to a mother in her forties. There were different experience levels of dance too and different levels of dyspraxic-ness.

The workshops

The workshops happened in Glasgow at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and each one lasted three hours. They were made up of tasks and games to generate and experiment with movement and were also made up of discussion, sharing of experiences and eating good food. From early on, it was clear that having a dyspraxic only space was rare and was the first time that had happened for them (it was for me!). So, people were really keen to share experiences and compare their dyspraxias, and were very open to play and challenges.

We worked to respond to the question: what would a dyspraxic choreography look like? This led us to try and create a performance that encapsulated dyspraxic qualities and felt natural to the participants. It was clear a 5, 6, 7, 8 memorised dance was not the ticket for us, and instead we made movement from playing games and performing tasks, and relied on improvisation and clear visual scores so we didn't have to remember anything. You'll see some snippets of the work we created in the video that we'll watch now.

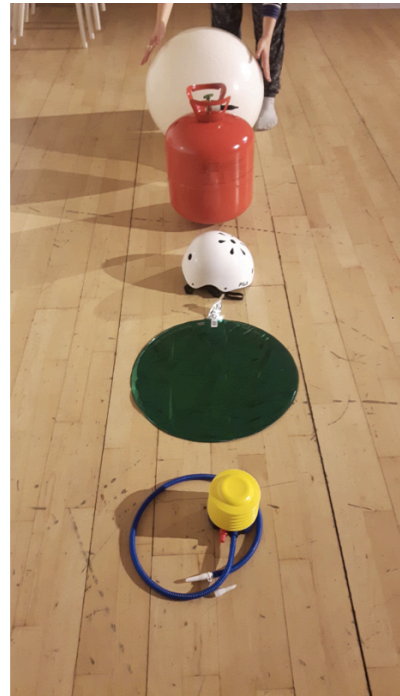
[At this point in the presentation we watched a five-minute snippet of a longer video titled *between the doing and the thinking / a reflection on dyspraxic movement workshops*, a video document that was filmed and edited by Molly-Mae Whawell. This longer version can be found at <https://vimeo.com/218864736>]

I originally planned to run these workshops as a research exercise to understand what dyspraxic movement was, and how different dyspraxic people dance, and take that information forward into my own solo work. However, I feel that the workshops developed into something else and I became less focused on my solo work and more interested in the participants, their stories, their movements and the group dynamic. It was clear that this all-dyspraxic group became a small community over time. I initially imagined that these workshops would mainly be made of practical exercises, but the conversations and the relationships made became a really important part of the workshops, and took them in a more collaborative direction, where we started to create performance material like you saw at the end of the video.

Where next?

These workshops were the starting point for engaging creatively with the possibilities of a dyspraxic choreography. I'm continuing to develop this work, now called -ish, but am continuing with the work as a solo performance. Even though the work has returned to being a solo, I feel there are lots I am taking in to it from the workshops with the participants. The main question being: **what would a visibly dyspraxic performance look like?** and I feel this has influenced what form and content the solo work will have. However, I want to continue working with the group in the future. I feel the workshops presented potential to develop into performance of its own, created and performed by the group of dyspraxic individuals. Members of the group have been vocal about it continuing, which is great.

So, where next? I'm being supported by an Unlimited Emerging Artists Commission, to develop the solo performance of *-ish*, which is great and that I am very thankful for. I am continuing to work with creative producer Daisy Douglas and will also be receiving support from artists Luke Pell, Frauke Requart and Laura Bradshaw. I am so thankful and lucky to have all these people on board. I've returned to some of the creative ideas that I had in my original application.



I'm playing with objects that have a dysfunctional movement quality, like helium balloons at different levels of in/de-flation, roller-skates, a space hopper, and using these objects to access a movement quality that edges on chaotic and is outside of is usually considered expressive, 'beautiful' movement.

The first public sharing of this will be on February 7th 2018 at The CCA, Glasgow, as part of Buzzcut's Double Thrills. Then, I'll have another work-in-progress for an invited audience in June, then if all goes well we'll take it to Unlimited festival at Southbank and Tramway. Fingers crossed!

Thanks for listening,

With thanks to:

Janice Parker Projects, The Saltire Society, Daisy Douglas, Luke Pell, Molly-Mae Whawell and the workshop's participants.