

SINGAPORE TATLER



PEOPLE

Creating Fluid Form PATRIZIA CERRONI

By Margerie Kahlenberg

Intoxicating. That is one word often used to describe Italian dancer-choreographer Patrizia Cerroni and the performances of her Barefoot

Dancers troupe. The name, not surprisingly, comes from the fact that they dance barefoot. To Patrizia this obvious disregard of the conventional is only the beginning of a whole new way of expression and feeling in a dance.

Patrizia is 36 but speaks with the enthusiasm of a teenager when she relates her past. "I was sent for ballet lessons when I was six. Even then, I already knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life," she says. "I danced professionally with Carla Frecci when I was 16. But I

was introduced to modern dancing when I was 18. It was then that I met Jacque Cebron at the National Academy of Dance in Rome. He was a fabulous dancer-choreographer-teacher. I studied under him and he introduced me to modern dancing."

According to Patrizia, modern dancing is a far better form of expression than ballet. Ballet requires precise techniques and movements that have been used for years; nothing is new. Modern dance on the other hand is free movement, giving birth to individuality and originality.

"Ballet, and any other type of dance, is a language," she says. "To me, ballet is like Latin or Greek and like any old language it has no present context — it is completely out of our contemporary lives. So we shouldn't use it any more."

How then does one explain the good ticket sales for ballet performances these days? Surely Patrizia must concede that ballet will always be a part of modern life because of its form and beauty. "People are fond of ballet because like any classical art it is easy to understand," she says. "Whatever messages it carries are very simple to grasp. And the messages are always the same — good versus evil, love and hate. That's why classical ballet is more easily available in the theatres and television these days; people find it easier to relate to because they have been taught how to."

In modern dance there are no set patterns of expression; the way in which the dancer can use her body to deliver messages of agony, ecstasy or confusion is limitless. Perhaps this freedom of expression explains why many audiences are often mesmerised during a performance. Not only are the audience forced to break out of the ordinary and conventional, but they have to reconsider their thoughts and emotions, a formidable prospect for any artist to inspire.

Dance is almost inseparable from music and it also owes a debt to mathematics, according to Patrizia, who learned the mathematical side — how to use the available space on stage — from American choreographer Merce Cunningham. However, she believes it should still be an emotional experience for the dancer, rather than a coldly calculated one.

"My dance is already music," she says. "You can influence the audience and make them feel the way you want them to as you move to the music with your body," she goes on. "If I move and create something, you can see and feel the musicality, the rhythm and the harmony. I love to dance in silence. But there is another way to dance, to go into the music and dance. You're influenced and guided by the music in your movements. If you dance in silence, it's much deeper — it comes from inside. I feel it's much stronger to create movement from yourself and not from outside influence. Oh, you can use any kind of music for modern dance — classical, contemporary, rock."

It is difficult to believe that this lady who gestures when she speaks has to be pushed into creating new pieces of choreography. "Every time I want to start a new piece, I feel unsure and would much rather sit back than start it," says Patrizia. "This is where my friends come in. They listen to my ideas and then encourage me to begin. Without them, I don't think I'd be where I am today."

Choosing members of the troupe is a problem she has had since she founded The Barefoot Dancers in 1972. She does not choose people simply because they have already made a name for themselves.

She explains: "I try to find an affinity with them. It's important to choose people who have the same sensitivity as me. My type of dance is very expressive. Because of that, The Barefoot Dancers must place a lot of value on the spiritual aspects of life instead of the material aspects."

For Patrizia, the spiritual sensitivity in a person is of utmost importance if there is to be any understanding of life. When she was 28, she went to India, a country that has made an impact in her life. "India changed me," she says. "When I went to India, I was at a critical point in my life. I had quit my job and was dissatisfied. I spent six months travelling all over that country and eventually based myself in New Delhi. That was when I started to create. Now, I return to India to look up old friends and to have some time to myself every year."

It takes more than talent alone to create what Patrizia has for the world of art. Courage and patience are needed as well. In Singapore The Barefoot Dancers were favourably received. Perhaps more and more of such dances should be brought into the country to educate the public. Only then can we develop a real appreciation of the contemporary and beautiful.



Patrizia Cerroni