

THE GAP- 18 steps through (dance) history PART II

WHO AND WHAT

Welcome

Im Liza Penkova,

I am a freelance choreographer based in Göteborg

I have of course other roles and I will speak about them as we go.

To give you an introduction to what kind of work I do

I will focus on one of my recent works THE GAP

It's a solo performance and it makes the second part of a trilogy project which I started back in 2020:

18 steps through (dance) history.

(No, it's not a self-help book)

The trilogy is an attempt to reveal how through the history

Contemporary dance as an art-form

Carries strong socio-cultural-political and philosophical reflections.

Emancipatory stories and practices of freedom

It is never just dance.

Just like it is never,

just art,

just music or

just literature.

My attempts manifest themselves as performances, workshops, installations and texts.

In one line I could say

I work with dance history and aesthetics.

But to be more precise:

I work with and on stories of dance (and its aesthetics).

Most of all this trilogy is an ode to this beautiful artform- dance.

An insistence on work that grounds itself

in deep intellectual reflection, movement search and research.

THE GAP

18 steps through (dance) history PART II

LIZA PENKOVA



www.penkova.cc

WHEN AND THEN

The GAP had its official premier in november 2022 @ [3eVåningen](#) in Göteborg

Thanks to the co-production from [Vitlycke CPA](#)

I was able to continue reworking the work

performing as much as I could throughout 2023.

By December 2023 I gathered a new technical team

And was able to achieve a fulfilling version of the show

worth selling nationally and internationally.

This is why I say

THE GAP re-premiered in December 2023 @ [Atalante](#), in Göteborg.

At the moment I am looking for possibilities to tour this particular solo

As a means to accumulate budget for other parts of the trilogy

And specifically for the making of a new performance

that I envision has a premier in Spring/Fall 2026 (you tell , where).

In it, I would like to engage performers of different ages and dance experiences

And to pay them in cash and not just in joy of performing, travelling or per diems..

I will speak shortly about the third part at the end of this presentation.

THE GAP focuses on questions of

accessibility and inclusivity of contemporary dance and its practices

From an inter-cultural perspective

Directly touching on the topic of decentralisation of narratives and timelines

The totality of the trilogy has been, so far, supported by


[The Swedish arts grants committee](#), [The Swedish Arts council](#) and [The city of Göteborg](#)

generous residencies

[@Movement research/New York](#), [@Danscentrum/Väst](#), [@3eVåningen](#)

[@MDT/Stockholm](#), [@Hallen/Farsta](#), [@Le Boson/Brussels](#)

co-produced by [Vitlycke Center of Performing arts](#).



THE GAP
18 steps through (dance) history PART II

2022 november @ 3eVåningen, Göteborg

2023 march @ Konstkollektivet, Mölnda

2023 september @ HERE: NOW festival/
Vitlycke CPA, Tanumshede. (co-production)

2023 december @ Atalante, Göteborg

With support from
Swedish arts committee
The Swedish Arts council
The city of Göteborg

Residency
@Movement.research/New York
@Danscentrum/Väst
@MDT/Stockholm
@Hallen/Farsta
@Le Boson/Brussels
co-produced by
@Vitlycke Center of Performing arts.

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PRIVILEGES

THE GAP is first of all a story,
It's a story about freedom, understanding freedom.
Before I go on, I would like to ask you some questions (If I may):

Have you ever felt lost, confused about contemporary dance?
Have you ever wondered in relation to exactly WHAT
are you to be CON-TEMPO-RARY?
Did you ever had a feeling that
Most of the time you are ON time but
You definitely are not always WITH time. (*u know con-tempo-rary*)

Earlier in my professional life I was mainly a dancer.
World famous schools, companies and choreographers
Vaganova method, Swedish Ballet school, Gothenburg opera ballet,
P.A. R.T.S, Rosas, Michelle Noiret, Kunst-Werk,
Almost worked with Les Ballets C de La B ,
Was on stage at Kaaithatre, Theatre de la ville, B.A.M, Burgtheater, Hebbel...
Well, you get the picture.
This allowed me to travel the world and see lots of performances
Meet and be met by very different audiences.
Yes I am already 42 (soon 43)
In other words not really *emerging-* but a really *urging artist*.

Having experienced this privilege and status
I still was quite puzzled:
Why in one place something is considered contemporary and in another place not?
Why there in Germany it is considered modern but in Paris *bah no pas du tout!*
Why the work of an artist from Ecuador, Iran, Chile is misunderstood in European context
Or why the work from Balkans, Eastern Europe or from Western Sweden
could be considered too old fashioned, romantic, nostalgic or
even politically incorrect in Brussels or Stockholm? Irrelevant in New York.
Having lived in Belgium I have experienced these ambiguities even within the same country
Flemish and Wallons don't always agree on their contemporaneity.

I also noticed that even the most contemporary *connoisseurs*
Were not always able to distinguish innovation from a reproduction
Historical context was, surprisingly too often, ignored.
All this in a time when everyone was (and still partly is)
Really eager to speak with their ancestors.



HAVE YOU EVER FELT LOST, CONFUSED
ABOUT CONTEMPORARY DANCE?

WHERE ELSE

These questions, feelings and reflections are also what drives my academic research and interest in the history of (dance) aesthetics at MADE-program in the Stockholm University of the Arts.

No, not MA in choreography
MA in dance education.
(choreography is so 20th century),

This helped me to articulate that
In theory,
Contemporary arts are pretty simple:
Stories of emancipation and
Practices of freedom
However,
stories and practices
that have been developed
mainly within the Western context.
And in regards to contemporary dance,
Linked to very specific socio-cultural-political timelines.

Don't worry I won't give you a lecture.
Hm.

Investigating
the history of dance, dance education
and its aesthetics
@
MADE-program in
Stockholm University of the Arts

STOCKHOLM | STOCKHOLMS
UNIVERSITY | KONSTNÄRLIGA
OF THE ARTS | HÖGSKOLA

STORIES AND PRACTICES

Before starting to work as a choreographer
I had to find out in Practice
What stories inhabit my body?

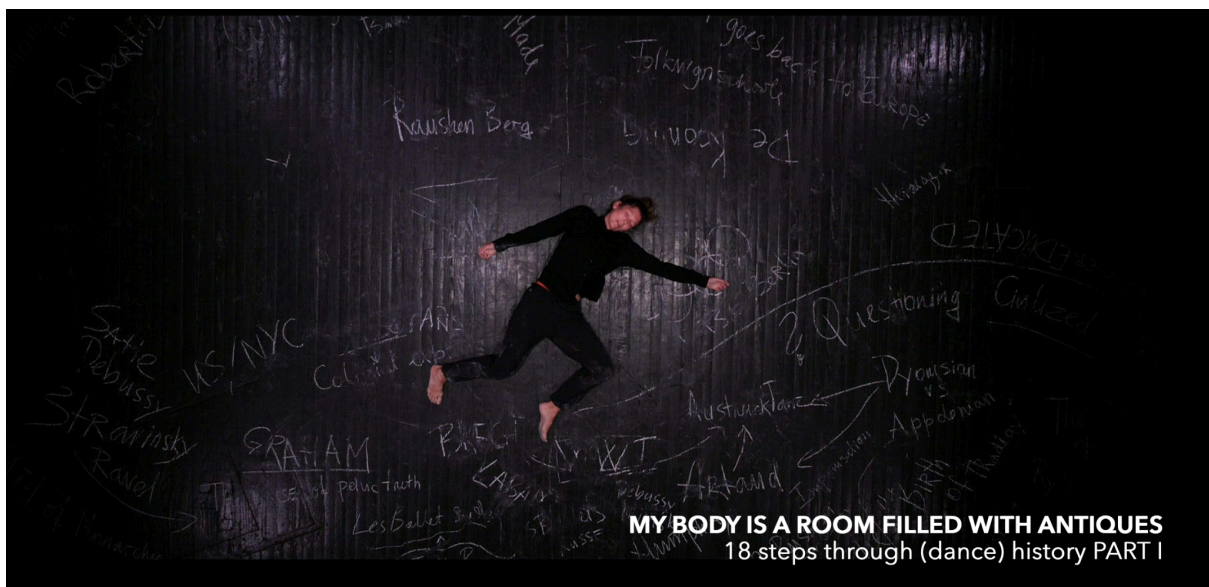
I realised my body was filled with stories and practices
of classicism, neo-classicism, folklore, modern techniques,
Drama, nostalgia, romanticism (a tiny bit of jazz)
And a bunch of post-modern minimalism... (clearly)
All this often wrapped in conventional hierarchy.
In other words
My body was like a room filled with antiques

This became the title of the first part of the trilogy
A 20 minute movement based solo where I try to
refurnish, update and recycle this *antiquariat*.
I mean, I really felt like an old shop.

However, I thought,
It has been serving me well
within the contemporary dance field
so there has to be some value to it.
I should not just throw it out.

The premier in Göteborg got cancelled 3 times
Due to the pandemic
And so as a solution
I called in my friend and collaborator Pauline Fonsny
An award winning belgian documentary film-maker
20 min, became 5 minutes on film
And it felt special even if only for 5 minutes.

"My body is a room filled with ... " is also a contemporary dance practice
What kind of room is your body?



CALLING A DRAMATURG.

When you have a problem in life, you call a psychiatrist.
Psychologist if you are lucky.
In theatre, you call the dramaturg.
I called a dramaturg.
He came,
he watched,
he said:

-Nice dancing and so what?
Who cares about history, aesthetics....
You know, the show is good or it's not good. It's simple.

I explained him who I was
Besides what I already mentioned
I explained that I am frustrated that
So many people (even in the field) lack historical background to what they are watching
Thus missing out on the aesthetic experience.

-Why don't you write a book? Open a restaurant? the dramaturg asked.
-Cuz stage is my home, I answered. I want to invite people to my home.
And if it to be a restaurant, it should be a good restaurant.
Good quality, tasty, reflective, touching, joyfull,
something you want to experience and share.

I'm not sure if I really said that but
This is how I started to work with Armin Kerber, an exceptional German/Swiss dramaturg.
And you know how dramaturgs work?
Well, they like to talk.
Luckily- me too, i also like to talk.
Eventually we come to an agreement and start working on THE GAP.

(If you want to talk to me after, please do
Who knows, maybe we come to an agreement
to tour THE GAP or share practices from our "Rooms filled with...")

WORKING WITH A DRAMATURGE

"Nice dancing, and so what?"



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

To give perspective on the stories and histories of dance
I had to tell my own story
based on two transformational experiences.

First experience
my emigration as a teenager
from the country of my origin Russia - THE East
To my new home in Sweden and later living in Belgium, France - THE West

Second experience is my transition
from being a hard core classically trained ballet student
before becoming a contemporary dancer
in the contemporary dance field in Europe.

(to avoid any misunderstanding I am against invasion and war. Slava Ukraini! But i still have family in Russia and it's not easy)



SILENT TALKING

I discovered I like writing (kind of silent talking)
I started to write short reflective poems:

*Dear East,
everything is different here in the West
In church, the priest makes jokes
And it all feels like last day of school*

*I have learned, un-learned.
I have set, reset, unforgotten, un-erased and
Still i find myself 2 decades too late
But now I see,
You too, dear West,
You too feel homesick for another world.*

When my own words were not enough I searched for answers in archives
I love archives!
I found tons of fun entertaining audio- quotations
from Icons of dance, music, and poetry from East to West, North to South.
The sound of a voice can reveal so much!
The way people spoke of/on/about dance,
can explain the traumas you, as a performer, still carry today.
Like this one for example: [La danse trahi celui qui la trahi!](#)
(It didn't make it to the final version of the show)
I use the voices of Pina, Martha, Jérôme,
Plisetskaya, Stravinsky, Balanchine and Diagilev.
One little extract can for ex. reveal the power relation between collaborators:

*Diaghilev: - No no no, this is the wrong tempo!
It should be pang pang!
Balanchine: - But Stravinsky said to play faster! Tatantata tata tam ta ta!
Diagilev: - NO! NO! NO! Its pang pang!*

There is sooo much fun stuff out there!
I eventually start to weave it all together with music
that takes the audience from Classical ballet
to the Contemporary pop music of today
And as I start to approach all this material choreographically
I realise that I like to be a bit funny and melodramatic:

*Dear East,
The bodies in the west
Move in awkward ways
Some dancers scream
Some just walk and walk and walk..
...No it's not like ballet!*

STORIES THAT ARE NOT MINE

This whole process started to reveal several gaps

TEMPORAL

CULTURAL

SOCIAL

POLITICAL.

Contemporary dance for way too long required an understanding of some very specific Timelines in order to be able to appreciate its aesthetics
Its absence of narratives and love for abstraction.

The process also revealed the reason behind my feeling of being off time.

not really feeling in tune

with the more sober and

minimalist version of postmodernism

I, as a dancer, was surrounded by.

I was dancing stories that were not mine

And I danced them well.



1968

Making of THE GAP-
became for me a story about freedom,
a practice of freedom and a story of emancipation
from dominant aesthetics and their timelines

Which for me at that time had a lot to do with
1968 and dance in sneakers (*Terpsichore in sneakers*)

Calling a dramaturg was a scary but an important step in my career
It helped me to find to my own version of *post post postmodernism*
(Or whatever you prefer to call it)
Contemporary with my time
In this time
Understanding my own choreographic freedom
That manifests through movement, writing, acting,
Teaching, reading, talking, researching, archiving,
learning roller derby, following zlatan on insta,
accordion playing...
living and working in Göteborg.

With this story I hope to inspire others
To stop chasing the time that isn't theirs
Find their own contemporaneity
Define their own timelines
But also to say to the audience:
It's ok if you don't understand everything in contemporary dance
You don't need to stop.

Read, listen, watch and it will
become more and more clear. And fun.
You might even start to appreciate it as an artform
Because it can carry strong socio-cultural-political and philosophical reflections.
Emancipatory stories and practices of freedom.

Our bodies are filled with knowledge
Great dancing is never just dance..



THANK YOU

To sum it all up:

THE GAP is a solo filled with
Great dancing, critical reflections relevant to our times
Stories of dance wrapped in melodrama, humour,
Accompanied by voices of icons and great music.

THE GAP focuses on questions of
accessibility and inclusivity of contemporary dance and its practices
From an inter-cultural perspective
Directly touching on the topic of decentralisation of narratives and timelines

All this work wouldn't be possible
Without the help and advice from fantastic
Colleagues, Professors, Friends,
MY TEAM,
And all the support from residencies and
The Swedish cultural fundings.

THANK YOU

ARMIN KERBER dramaturgy
NELSON LIMA lights
PER-HENRIK MÄENPÄÄ sound
ANNE CATHERINE KUNZ costume
DAVID DROUARD outside eye choreography
PAULINE FONSNY film
PRODUCENTBYRÅN admin

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COMMITTEE, SWEDISH ARTS COUNCIL

SUPPORT ME

As pornographic as the next slide sounds.:

FILL THE GAP, INVITE PENKOVA

Give me the money and I come for free

Give me a tour and I will blow the minds of your audience

Co-produce, give residencies, opportunities and context to teach and share

Invite my team- you won't regret it.

I work ass

FILL THE GAP, INVITE PENKOVA

PAY ME, AND I COME FOR FREE
INVITE MY TEAM TO RESIDENCY

GIVE US THE MONEY
CO-PRODUCE, YOU WON'T REGRET

TALK TO ME DIRECTLY, CALL ME, MAIL ME

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FUTURE

Starting june 2025

I'm ready to start the research for the final part of this trilogy:

18 steps through (dance) history PART III: *The house of the pelvic floor- a ballet for 5 performers.*

Continuing to delve into the history and archives of Western dance practices has led to an observation that the pelvic region is almost never an initiator of movement. Could it be a question of the good old dichotomy between Apollo and Dionysus? What stories does a pelvis tell? This time Penkova traces back to the formation of classical ballet to find out.

I hope to premier in Spring/ Fall2026

YOU TELL ME: WHEN, WHERE AND FOR HOW MUCH.



