



Interview: Richard Move

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Born Richard Winberg, Richard Move started out as a go-go dancer in a club – where he got his stage name from the manager, who happened to be a convicted murderer. Today, however, he is renowned for his research interest in the late, great dance icon Martha Graham, and recreating her performances, which local audiences got a sneak peek of when he came to town last month for Martha@ACM (performing four of Graham’s classic dance pieces) at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) as part of the Singapore International Festival of Arts’ (SIFA) pre-festival, The OPEN. This month, he’s back for the main fest with his award-winning Martha@...

The 1963 Interview, where he portrays Graham in a re-creation of a recently-discovered conversation with influential dance critic Walter Terry that foreshadowed her retirement. We spoke to Move to find out more.

Let's start from the very beginning. What was the catalyst that made you want to take your admiration for Martha Graham's work one step further and actually incorporate her into your career so literally?

It's a combination of things. I started training as a theatre student, and that's when I first encountered Graham as a teenager in my high school's performing arts programme. And as I trained, I realised that the theatre I really liked and wanted was dance theatre like Graham's work. It was very interesting at the time because Graham was considered very old-fashioned and she was not an accessible artist to students. There was something about this notion that she was being withheld from me and I wasn't allowed access to her, which compelled me to want to know more, see more, and experience it. And then I was new to New York around the time she died and I was studying with Robert Fitzgerald, who was Graham's teacher, from the 1960s. Robert and I, around the time of her death [in 1991] became very, very close, and Robert started to share with me his 30-year relationship with her as his student and as a person and human being, so I became very obsessed at the time with the person behind the legend.

At the same time I was the partner in a very fantastic performance space, so I had my own theatre and that's when I realised that she needed to continue on, she needed to be reborn, not as an aged crippled lonely woman, but as a person at the top of her game. So it's been this amazing odyssey and journey with Graham that in a way I seemed to have little to do with. I mean, it's like things just happened.

Tell us about your first performance as Martha.

To use her own words: Sweet terror, joyous despair and divine turbulence. It was so intense because before we'd even done the first performance, we were threatened with lawsuits and cease and desist orders from the Martha Graham entities. And this became a press

item, so we already had this incredible buzz and press before we even started, and word spread very quickly that this thing was about to take place, and I knew that some of the actors who'd worked with Graham from the '50s, like Yuriko, the Japanese dancer, was coming; so was Stuart Hodes and Merce Cunningham, who was the second man to join Martha's company. So the intensity and the anticipation was sweet terror and I became something else that night. And thus began my journey with her.



When you go on stage, do you think of yourself as Martha Graham herself, or are you very conscious that you are presenting Richard Move's interpretation of Martha Graham?

I lose consciousness. I'm not me, but I'm not not me. But the predominant feeling is again to quote Graham: I keep the channel open. I feel as if my body becomes a conduit for her and I find that often I have no sense of myself and no self-consciousness. That's when I know I've had my best performances.

I felt that way after my second night here at the ACM for example, once I felt that I understood the space, the antiquities I was partnering, how much room I had that she was able to enter and that I left for that

90 minutes. I don't know where I was, maybe I was still down in the dressing room, but she was in the galleries [laughs]. I wasn't. I might have still been at the hotel! Or at the casino.

When you perform a routine in a new place, how much adaptation do you have to do? Your performance at ACM last month, for instance, seemed very site-specific.

For the ACM, it was a wonderful process. I got there and pretty much immediately knew where Lamentation needed to take place; it was as if I saw the space and it was built for me. The galleries with the Buddha, in particular, with the monks, the dragon, the swords and the daggers – this timeless, violent, beautiful space felt like Singapore had built me a theatre set.

The adaptation was absolutely clear and well defined, and hence, the performance. I was not performing solo. I was performing with the Buddha, the monks and the dragon, and I had all of the military instruments of death I needed around me to fulfil the murder and the suicide. Martha's career basically spanned the entire 20th century, so wherever I go, whether Berlin or Holland or Singapore, she had a history somewhere. She was such a prolific writer and poetic speaker that there's so much documentation of all this. So when I go some place, I do some preparation, I find as much information as I can from the brochures and websites, and we make informed decisions.

Do you see yourself as a dancer or an actor?

I think it's best to refer to Martha. In her own words, she was so ahead of the curve on everything, for instance, everything curated for SIFA is probably multi-interdisciplinary, and again Martha called her works dance plays, and it was through the body dancing and through the body speaking that she communicated and performed as herself and I'm doing the same. So I embrace that, it's not even a fine line, I feel they are a whole, one and the same, essential and integral to my performance as Graham.

Any final thoughts before you return?

Singapore's my new favourite place! Everyone was so welcoming, I find the city's history so fascinating, the food spectacular, and I think

I'd like to spend more and more time there. Yes, it's my absolute favourite place, and Martha will be back, too.

Richard Move and *MoveOpolis!* in "Martha@...The 1963 Interview" is at the SOTA Drama Theatre on **21-23 Aug.**