

INTERVIEW WITH CLAIRE PORTER

Interviewee: Claire Porter (CP)
MA Dance 1977 - The Ohio State University

Interviewer: Rashana Smith (RS)
MFA Dance 2012 - The Ohio State University

RS: Do you teach or refer to Vickie's Weight Studies material in your classes?

CP: I took Vickie's Composition Class in 1975-76 and remember her weight study but at the time I wasn't able to grasp it. I had to work with it on my own and then study LMA and then work some more. I had been much more tuned to space and time when I started with her and found weight to a new distinction. What I do recall is her emphasis on resiliency. She opened that aspect of weight to me. And when I was teaching choreography at Columbia Teachers College and coaching dancers with weight work in particular, I did play with resiliency. It made a big difference in how I moved and how I was able to see movement.

RS: How did working with Vickie change or affect how you teach?

CP: I definitely align with Vickie's structure of teaching composition. It is so important for the developing artist to have tools. And these she taught! I now often ask my students for Vickie's 1-minute-no-repetition study (very revealing), a weight study, time study, rhythm study and space study. I work with Theme & Variation too, something she drove home and that I find invaluable. Her openness to all kinds of movement made so much more available to me, which made me experiment more with how, I taught.

RS: How did working with Vickie change or affect how you choreograph?

CP: She helped me zero into the movement vocabulary itself and the many, many possibilities of how to play with that material. Making distinctions in movement that one can address and speak about with the Laban vocabulary makes a tremendous difference in what is available to work with. So much detail is possible, so much nuance is possible, so much development is possible, and editing is easier. And allows for so much more to think about! And, her work with chance made surprise connections and mixed up structures all the more fun! I remember her saying anything is "fair game."

RS: How did working with Vickie change or affect how you perform?

CP: Vickie once told me that I was sometimes in space and sometimes not in space. I didn't know what she meant at the time but since have become so much more aware of space – you can be in it, or you can be spaced out. You can work with presence in space – the growing or diminishing one's reach space and performance space. What a revelation! And now having worked with the Laban distinctions in space and the

Scales I have all kinds of toys to play with. And I have made and continue to make dances based on space – from *Green Dress Circle*, about orienting the audience, to *Guided Tour*, about perspective. Also, I work with language and voice in performance and find that treating the delivery of the spoken word with a spatial intent relaxes the voice and allows it to be heard. Thank you, Vickie!

What one thinks about on stage is revealed to an audience. With Vickie's clarity and specificity in what one is focusing on allowed me to attend to the movement itself in performance, which draws an audience in - very different from thinking about how one's dance is being perceived, for example, or what a reviewer is thinking. She provided tools for being present in performance.

RS: What did you take from the experience of working with Vickie?

CP: I was inspired by her intelligence and how she brought intelligence to the making of work. And expected us to do the same. And whether inspired to work by an impassioned drive or by just giving oneself a problem to solve, one must still work. And Vickie gave me tools to make work when it's difficult or I'm afraid. She gave me tools to dig deeper, to question, to ask more of oneself, to know there's always further to go.

She also inspired me with her generosity of giving feedback. I have taken that to heart and work to bring that directness and critical mind to other choreographers with whom I share the working process.

RS: Any anecdotes you'd like to share?

CP: I like how she worked in pencil, always open to change.

RS: Since you're a CMA, how would you compare Vickie's weight qualities to that of Laban's?

CP: I think Vickie's weight work focused on sensing one's body weight, having it ready for action. The Laban Work would describe this as flow and going in and out of heaviness, giving in to one's weight and recovering. The Effort Quality of weight is embodied Strength and Lightness with heavy as a passive Strength. Slightly different.