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INTERVIEW

Choreographer Peter Kyle: *I was worried about Trump's victory, but I understood that against the background of the events in Donbass our problems are not serious*

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Choreographer Peter Kyle photo: Anton Ovchinnikov

"Students in America raise their straight arm high, and Ukrainian - half-bent and low"

"Glavkom" met with American choreographer Peter Kyle in Kyiv. He came to Ukraine for six weeks as a fellow of the prestigious Fulbright International Exchange for Scholars and Students program. The project is funded by the US government. Peter came to teach English to Ukrainian students. The choice of dance teacher was quite strange, but one of the universities - the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences - still decided that future teachers of English will be useful to improve their skills, working not only with a native speaker, but also with a person who can live original form to immerse students in the world of art. "When I didn't just say something, I made the students move, they looked at me like a dragon with three heads," Peter Kyle recalls of his lectures.

Peter Kyle lives in New York. He calls himself lucky because he has a successful career as a dancer and choreographer. He was a performer in one of the most famous troupes of modern dance in the United States at the time - Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis. Kyle has also worked with contemporary dance legends such as Mark Morris and Eric Hawkins. Today, Peter has his own dance company, teaches at three American colleges, is a member of the board of directors of the Triskelion Arts Brooklyn Arts Center, and is engaged in filming dance videos. His visit could not go unnoticed by representatives of modern choreography in Ukraine. So Peter's program in Kyiv was supplemented by master classes and filming of a dance film with Ukrainian dancers, which he directed. These last projects of the American choreographer in Ukraine were organized by the Zelyonka Fest contemporary dance festival and the Contemporary Dance Platform Association.

At the end of Peter Kyle's visit to Kyiv, the Glavkom asked if his expectations from the trip had come true, about the projects implemented here in a short time, as well as about the role of art in critical times for the country.

Tell us about your work with Ukrainian students. What were they talking about? How did you build classes? How did young Ukrainians perceive the English teacher - choreographer?

I admit, it was a bit risky to invite a dancer to teach English.

I taught at the university for students who in the future will also become teachers, as far as I understand, of English. As part of the exchange program, I proposed for my classes a topic about culture in the United States through the prism of the development of modern dance. I understand that the university accepted my candidacy in order to better motivate students to study in order to arouse their greater interest in classes.

In the United States, you teach at three colleges. Have you noticed any differences between American and Ukrainian students as a teacher?

This is probably ridiculous, but I have the following observations: my students in America, when they want to say something, raise their straight hand high up, with some great enthusiasm, and Ukrainian - half-bent and low. But you see, it's subjective, it's just something I've seen for a while. I don't really think there are any differences in behavior.

The only thing is that I don't know how much they were told about me at the university, how they explained their choice to bring a dancer to teach them. Because sometimes I made them move. And it seems to me that they did not expect this at all. For example, I gave my students the following task: they had to sit somewhere in the city and watch people move around for 30 minutes. Then they had everything they saw, all the movements of people described in words, in English. I sent these recordings to America to my student dancers, and they had to reproduce all these movements based on these texts. Such a translation: some see, describe - others read, reproduce. Post factum, we held a video conference between Ukrainian and American students. It was interesting for everyone.

Some students here are very involved in the learning process, curious, some are not very motivated, but it is everywhere. Also, not everyone attended my classes because they work. I

don't know if this is typical for Ukraine, but there is a difference with America. Our students go to work after classes. And here, it seems, sometimes instead. But I emphasize: I have little experience here, so I can not draw any conclusions.



Choreographer Peter Kyle photo: Anton Ovchinnikov

Tell us about a project you have already implemented with Ukrainian dancers. Did you make a film in Kyiv?

So. I have a project of miniature dance films. This is, in fact, a kind of series. For about 10 years now, I have been making dance movies lasting one to four minutes specifically so that they can be watched on the screens of our mobile phones. The composer writes music specifically for these films. The idea for such a project arose when not everyone had smartphones. But we have seen that development is going in this direction. It was already clear that content would eventually become mobile. And it was interesting to create something that could be viewed on mobile devices. In fact, this project was done for the future.

We make these films in different countries, in different cities, with new artists, we also try to explore the architecture of the cities where we shoot. Such a project was filmed in Kyiv as well. I was thinking of using your brooms in the movie because I liked them. We have - if we talk about life - it's usually such high brooms, and from what I saw in you, it's such small brooms, which is strange to me. And when a person has to clean, he has to bend down to the floor. This

makes her move quite differently. But in the end we filmed at the university where I taught, because I really liked the stairs in one of the buildings. These stairs provided an opportunity to play with space and time.

By the way, we actually shot the whole film upside down. In fact, how we perceive space is the theme of my films, which I have been making for 10 years.

Where can I see this work?

I have it on my computer (laughs). Or mostly in New York. The problem is that we don't post these movies online. Most of these films are shown on small screens in special installations. In Brooklyn, we show them in a miniature cinema for one person. In fact, it is a box where a person puts his head and watches this movie on a small screen. We like the physical interaction with these boxes: the viewer has to physically do something to watch the movie, open the curtains, put his head in there ...

The film I made in China last year, by the way, was the first to be made for the big screen. But it's not public yet, because I submitted it to the dance film festival, which will take place in February at Lincoln Center (New York's largest cultural center - "Glavkom"). I am very worried about this. The project is meaningful and at the same time does not cost much money, and is portable, portable.

Was it easy for you to work with Ukrainian dancers?

It was not easy to make a film, because not everyone spoke a foreign language.

But all the dancers who came to me were ready for what I gave them, they were ready for a joint search for something new. Those who would not be interested, I think, did not come.

The average viewer may get the impression that dancers in Ukraine, if we talk about modern dance, are divided into two conditional groups. The first is aimed at a show format, where the main thing is to do more tricks, something to impress the audience. The second - works in the format, so to speak, "smart dance", invests in its product deep meaning, sometimes sacrificing form and, consequently, losing the audience. Are these problems close to you as a director? Do you have a problem with the "clash" of views on modern dance in the United States?

In New York, it is difficult for dancers to survive, earning only by dancing. As a choreographer who lives and works there, I can say that I earn mostly by teaching. And I understand those artists and choreographers who, in order to make money with their art, exist in certain conditions of business and competition and create different products.

My work today was strongly influenced by the period of collaboration with Alwin Nikolais, who is considered by most to be the "father", the first person to start using multimedia, modern technology in dance on stage. So after getting the technical base, I went to a deeper understanding of dance, its relationship to space, philosophy ... I'm interested in exploring the

connections between thoughts and movements. But when I told students in English about working with space in Ukraine, sometimes even those who did ballet or other dances looked at me like a dragon with three heads (laughs).

It still seems to me that our platform of modern dance is small, so to speak, on the border of culture. But, as my teacher of anthropology said, it is precisely what is on these borders, in such marginal genres of art, in such not very popular activity, perhaps accessible to few, that is the main thing. And I'm very happy to be on the board of directors of an art center in Brooklyn and to have the opportunity to perform there. Most of the artists who perform there are young people. For them, I'm probably just an old man already. But this is a very cool place, because it supports young people, gives them the opportunity to take risks, to try something new in art.

Also, does it seem that only an audience that is somehow connected to the world of dance goes to dance performances or performances? A dance program in the format of a show can still gather ordinary citizens, but a performance is unlikely. It's hard to imagine that people after work would take it and decide: shouldn't we go to such and such a choreographer. Instead, they go to a regular theatrical performance. Is that the problem in the States?

Yes, dance audiences are people who are connected to dance in one way or another. This is a problem for America as well. Maybe it's just because people grow up and lose touch with their bodies. See how the child moves, how she sits, when she watches the play, she can sit on the floor or lie down. And then she is taught at school and in society that this should be done this way, and not otherwise, that it is necessary to sit like this, to move like this, to act like this. Adults are already sitting on the same chairs. And dancers use their body as a tool for learning about life, to gain some knowledge, interaction. I think that's the problem with a lot of people not opening their heads to dance.

And it seems to me that we are not making enough effort to attract a new audience.

Because, as you said, people go to dance shows. It is true that some people find it difficult to see what is interesting in the specific things we do. And I'm not saying that we should make art simpler, but we need to better build communications, attract the public.

Do you understand what exactly needs to be done to expand the audience?

Honestly, I have no answer to the question of what to do. But I had an interesting experience. In 2012, I created a solo work for 60 minutes - "100 days". Until then, I just came to the studio, decided that I wanted to put such a dance, saw the result in my head and just realized my vision. But I decided to try to create something unusual for myself. At that time I was just reading the biography of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. And there was a description of the moment when his wife went to Egypt, and he could not go with her. And he said to her, "Remember everything so she can tell me later, and I can imagine everything." I decided that for 100 days I would walk around New York with a video camera every day and film how people move. At first I thought I would watch people, and then I would interpret their movements at my own discretion. But I realized that it was interesting to recreate everything as it is. I began to

study exactly the movements that I filmed on camera, which made 100 people, whom I filmed for 100 days. And from these movements he made a performance.

And I got two surprises. First, it turned out that from a physical point of view, it was the most difficult performance I have ever done in my life. The shortest movement lasted three to four seconds, the longest - more than a minute. Some movements were wide, free, almost danceable, some - very specific, small, specific, such as when a woman, worried, fingering her hair.

Secondly, the audience's reaction was very unexpected for me. He liked it. It is clear that I was interested in shooting people, reproducing their movements, understanding how they move, why. But I didn't expect the viewer to be so interested in it. Perhaps people were surprised to see how these daily movements that they see, carried out in everyday life, become a full-fledged performance. Maybe they realized that all these were their movements. And this is one of the possible ways to connect with the public. I'm not saying that everyone should do that now. But this case gave me the understanding that there are different ways to engage the audience in what is happening in the dance, on stage.

I'm already thinking about doing this experiment again, but in a different place, in a different country. Compare how ordinary people's physical activity differs, whether it is related to the cultural code, traditions. Here's how students in different countries raise their hands to say something.

Tell us, does the state support the development of dance in the United States?

Sometime in the 1970s, there was a boom in dance development in the United States because the government invested in its development. By the way, this was the peak of the careers of Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis. They had the opportunity to travel around the country, perform their work and earn well thanks to support this. When Ronald Reagan became president in the 1980s, public debate began, and taxpayers were outraged that their money went to support the dance. And Reagan has drastically reduced this funding item. Nearly everything I do with my company, I do through private donations.

In Kyiv, for example, there are several state theaters that have their own premises and state funding. If we talk about modern choreography, then only one theater - "Kyiv Modern Ballet" - has its own premises and support from local authorities, it is part of the Kyiv Municipal Academic Opera and Ballet Theater for Children and Youth ...



Choreographer Peter Kyle photo: Anton Ovchinnikov

Our system differs from the Ukrainian one at least because we do not have a ministry of culture. We have the National Art Foundation of the United States, which distributes government grants to art organizations. Everyone receives money in the same way: they apply and receive funding. We have big dance companies that have big buildings, big staff, but there are few of them, only a few. Most of these organizations have a foundation. This makes it possible to receive help from donors. They give money to support art, because in that case taxes are reduced for them, because it is support for art.

I did not apply for support from the state, because the application process is complex and time consuming. I feel that, of course, with support I would work easier. But I also understand that in that case, to focus on my own company, I will have to leave teaching, and that's part of the income that I can't just take and cut.

How much is a ticket to a dance show in New York?

A ticket to a small dance theater can cost \$20. And there is a tendency that more people are already going to watch the video, not live performance. Because tickets to Broadway cost \$200-400, and to some theaters - even more expensive. For people, going to the theater is no longer an everyday opportunity.

The events of recent years in Ukraine - the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbass - have given rise to fierce debates in the artistic community: can art be outside politics? Has this been a question for you, your colleagues?

An artist can go somewhere in a corner and quietly do his art there, if he wants to. But the question is: should he do so? Practically my work is not related to politics. But I like to think that, as someone said, everything is politics. People are involved in my performances and films - participants, spectators, they pass everything that happens there, draw some conclusions.

On September 11, 2001, the day the skyscrapers fell, I was in New York. I lived in Seattle at the time, but came to New York for a few days. And just when it happened, I got off the subway. I was about ten blocks from the skyscrapers. I was not in danger, but I saw how the towers fell, how people tried to escape, it was scary ...

The next day on the radio I heard a story about the British pianist Myra Hess. With the outbreak of World War II, when all concert halls in London were closed, she began performing solo concerts at the National Gallery. She did this for several years in a row, even if the bombs fell on London. I was very impressed with this story. Because after what happened in New York, I thought that I would not be able to work or perform in the near future, because thousands of people died ... Two or three days later I returned to the scene of the tragedy. I was walking past those buildings and from some office, from another studio I heard the tenor of the singer. And it was a kind of relief. Because there is music, life goes on, we continue to work ...

Since then, I have probably started to think about the purpose of art in such difficult, critical times ...

And what conclusion was reached?

I'm not sure I have an unequivocal answer. But if we go back to the example of a British pianist who played even when bombs fell on the city ... She gave some cultural way out of that difficult situation. People had a place where they could come and have a moral rest. It is very important. Of course, in a situation where a building is collapsing, it is important to save people first. But I can't say: don't make art when something like this happens. Therefore, perhaps, I can not answer this question.

Here in the United States, the recent presidential election took place. And many people have been and remain excited about what could happen to our country, politics, economy, culture as a result of this election. I have already experienced all these concerns about the events at home here in Ukraine. And he concluded for himself: when you are far away, not everything looks so bad. I mean, of course, I'm not happy with the election results, I voted for Hillary Clinton, even realizing that this is not the best option. I was worried about Donald Trump's victory, because although I don't know what to expect from him, I have different views and I see a lot of hatred in him. But I was in Ukraine, where there is a conflict, where there is a war in the east. And I realized that against this background, our problems are not so serious.

Before you came to Ukraine, what did you know about it? Did you have any expectations?

In principle, I knew nothing about Ukraine. But on the eve of the visit he read a special book by Professor Harvard, American and Ukrainian historian Serhiy Plohiy on the history of Ukraine ("Loss of Europe. History of Ukraine from the Scythian Wars to Independence" - "Glavkom"). It also says about the events of 2014-2015. So I received information about the conflict in eastern Ukraine, in Donbass. I was fascinated by your story.

Before that, I was closest to you only in Western Poland in 2009. So, of course, I didn't know what to expect from this trip. I am, in fact, a child of the cold war. There was still the USSR when I was growing up. And, perhaps, part of me was inclined to believe that somewhere, as it was there, it should be in Ukraine. At the same time, I understood that I had a false impression of this country. In the end, the visit here became informative for me.

What did you not expect to see here, for example?

Honestly, I didn't expect to see so many colorful, bright buildings - yellow, blue, pink ... I don't know why, but I didn't expect it.

I was also impressed by the hospitality of everyone I came in contact with here. And I did not expect to see such a strong national pride in Ukrainians.

Did you have problems in Ukraine as a tourist, as a person who does not know Ukrainian? It's about life.

I had no special problems. In the first days I was helped to orientate, explained how the subway and minibuses work. When I first rode a minibus here, I must have been worried, but nothing. And, of course, it's a strange feeling when you're in a new place and can't read anything. But before I came here, I tried to learn your alphabet. And I can even read a little. Don't understand, but read the letters as they sound. This helped me in some cases to understand where I was.

What will you tell your friends and students in the United States about Ukraine?

I advise you to visit this country. Because this is a real place with an unusual history. And you have a wonderful mix of modern and old architecture, there is something to look at. In New York, we also have old buildings, but few, and we don't have anything as old, historic, as yours. New York is a wonderful city, brilliant, new. But my favorite part of it is history. But our old buildings are new to you.

Kateryna Peshko, Glavkom

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