



Tero Saarinen. Photo: Sakari Vika

Originating from the West coast of Finland, Tero Saarinen started off in the Finnish National Ballet. "But it was that time in Finland when there were still the winds of Russia, and dance was very ballet orientated, very classical without very much else," he told me when we met at the Café Bastille in Paris. "At that time you were either a monster, a prince or the clown, and I was always categorised as the funny one. So I started to think well, OK, 26 years old, if I stay in this ballet I will always be the clown - which is kind of limiting. Then I saw the work of the modernists and I kind of woke up, and began to think well maybe I have something to say too. So, slowly, I started to make my own pieces. Jorma Uotinen was a big influence, not only for me but for many people, and two other Finnish choreographers who are not so well known outside of Finland. Like a baby, I woke up, my God, and I saw that this kind of dance exists. It was a revelation to realise that not every dancer has to be like Baryshnikov. I did not really think of becoming a choreographer, but somehow the body took over. Even though I trained all the time in classical, and I need it because I think it is a very good base for whatever - it is necessary somehow. Then I had this chance to work with Jorma alongside the company, and I started to get a flavour of something else. Next I did the ballet competition in Paris and it went well. So I felt strong enough to choreograph my own way, away from ballet.

"In 1992 I stopped working with the Finnish Ballet and went to Japan to study butoh, kabuki dance, and then I went to Nepal. I started off making solos because that is the easiest way to do something of your own. Then I made this trio with two other men, and formed Company Toothpick. Why Toothpick? Because I think it is kind of boring when you see these names for companies, and I thought why not something funny. I wanted to be more like a rock band - like The Toothpicks are coming! Also I used to live next to a match company when I was young, so first I thought maybe it's a match. But toothpick sounded better. Small, but sometimes kind of helpful.

"Now I'm in total hysteria because I am doing pieces for

other companies as well as trying to run Toothpick with not so much funding. It is very hard. Officially, the company is based in Finland, but as a dancer, I am based in Paris.

"For Kuopio this year, I will be bringing *UnDo*, a piece which I created for the Batsheva Dance Company in 1998, and which was premiered in Portugal by Ballet Gulbenkian in March. And then there will also be a new work [and "could you take some of my weight...?"] which we premiere in Saint Quentin-en-Yvelines at the end of May.

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"What is *UnDo* about? Well it's kind of about making things undone. Like most of my works - because I don't like reality, I like subconscious things - it reflects on the things I go through in my life, a collection of things that I see at a particular moment. The main thing in the piece is a black box, which for me symbolises the weight that we all have to carry. There are six dancers plus the seventh is the black box. It's almost like trying to solve something in my own life. It also has humour, but I hate to talk about it because it always makes it sound flat. The idea, when I started, was collecting things, emotions, feelings and I thought of calling it *Collector*. But then it went somewhere else, and I found some humour in it. It's a severe piece, but with some humour and it also has a fairytale feeling - a strange combination of words."

Compagnie Toothpick will be presenting *UnDo* and "could you take some of my weight...?" at the Kuopio Festival on 30 June and will also be performing at the Estivades Danses 99 in Paris on 6 July; *Inequilibrio - Castiglione* in Italy on 17 July; *Biarritz Culture* in France on 6 August; *Tanztheater International '99 Hannover* in Germany on 9 September; *Palais - Brussels 99* from 21 - 22 September; and *Trafo - Budapest* from 24 - 25 September.

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