

**INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL PARMENTER, MAARI GRAY, LYNE PRINGLE
THURSDAY 7 JULY 2016
INTERVIEWED BY CHRIS JANNIDES**

This in-depth 2 hour interview was conducted for an article in DANZ magazine about the revival of Michael Parmenter's 1985 work 'Insolent River: A Tango' for this year's TEMPO festival in Auckland. Michael made and performed the piece with Maari Gray in 1985 and then re-did it in 1988 with Lyne Pringle, changing its name to 'Insolent River: A Romance'. The interview discusses their memories and experiences of the original production, its impact on their lives and examines their feelings about a new generation of dancers doing it 30 years later.

CHRIS: *What questions exist around the work being revived now? Is Insolent River still called a 'romance'?*

MICHAEL: No it's not. I'm going back to the original title because of the fact that I am now a tango dancer. So it's now called *Insolent River: A Tango*. That was the original title. The version I did with Maari was called that, and then the version with Lyne was called *Insolent River: A Romance*. It was first done in 1985.

LYNE: The context of the work is very important because of why it was the way it was.

MAARI: What evolved from *Tango* to *Romance* is a good topic to discuss.

MICHAEL: The music was different between the two pieces, although there were some overlaps... and yet the structure of the work was still pretty close.

LYNE: What it was like to perform is something we should discuss.

MICHAEL: Yes. From the inside. Literally, underneath.

MAARI: And for me, what it was like to actually watch two other people perform something as intense as that.

MICHAEL: Maari had a different experience because she didn't know what she was letting herself in for. Whereas, when Lyne came to do it a few years later, it was a known quantity.

LYNE: I suppose first time round you didn't know where it was heading in a way.

MICHAEL: A relevant question for us is: Is the new version going to be a recreation or a new version? I would say it is going to be a new version in the same way that the second version was a new version and not a recreation. So it is a work that is recreated for the people who are going to perform it.

LYNE: It's not a standard piece of repertoire.

MAARI: Re-creation and evolution are two different things really.

MICHAEL: I think that's why it was re-named as well, because it was quite a different piece, even though the fundamental structure was the same.

MAARI: The other thing too is that what the audience had been exposed to at the time we did it was probably different by the time that it was done again. We had the protesters who were in the audience who saw it as potentially anti-women or about violence towards woman.

MICHAEL: I don't remember that.

MAARI: I do because I remember hearing about it. There

were a lot of women who were very well aware after the first night that there was this piece that looked like it was incredibly aggressive, almost violent towards women. I hadn't picked that up at all. I must have been completely ignorant of a lot of things actually, because a lot of this I didn't pick up until I had actually seen it as a member of the audience.

LYNE: Interesting reading.

MAARI: Also it was quite different and quite unique and raw, and quite confronting I think for a lot of people.

MICHAEL: Yes. Gruelling I guess is a word to describe it, but that's more of an experiential thing from the performers' perspective.

LYNE: The sexual politics of it is maybe a good question to think about. What the sexual politics of the piece were, because it's interesting to hear that reading of yours Maari. I'd have to really think it through because it felt very much like it was a relationship. It wasn't as if Michael was imposing. It was very much a partnership.

MAARI: But that's very much how people see relationships anyway. When you're actually in it, you read it differently to what people on the periphery see. I think questions about domestic violence and sexual politics are very relevant to now.

MICHAEL: I actually think there's quite a few things in it where the woman is the stronger of the two.

LYNE: Yeah, the woman is the person who is looking after the male, for sure.

MAARI: There's a lot of caring in it.

LYNE: When I was thinking about the work, there's so much in it about a relationship. It's just totally about a relationship. ... I think, though, for me there's something in all of this around the logistics of the work, because that was such a huge part of it. The logistics of working with that set was a major part of the experience for me. We had to reset every night after the show. After we'd just done this marathon. We didn't have the personnel on board to support us. The whole support structure around it was missing. We were out putting up posters. And we had to reset and repaint the floor every night.

MICHAEL: There's pictures of us shovelling the dirt to put it in the theatre ourselves.

LYNE: It was really tough. That was one of the toughest things for me.

MAARI: One of the things for me was the huge physical experience of it right from the very start.

LYNE: It wasn't just the dancing though.

MAARI: Yeah. It was the emotional experience of it. And

the mental experience was as much as the physical.

LYNE: I presume the infrastructure or production support this time around will be different. That was something we dealt with all the time back then, we just had no support whatsoever. Marketing. Production. Anything.

MICHAEL: It's interesting. I think the question that you raised, Lyne, about the production support, I hadn't thought about that. I mean, it's not going to be the same piece ... Are the dancers going to have the same experience without having been through the whole process of putting it together, not just the process of rehearsing it?

LYNE: I think that is a really relevant thing to now. I mean the whole shebang from being out at 12 o'clock at night putting up posters to staying in the theatre until half past 11 repainting the floor and then getting up the next day and doing it all over again. You know, people just don't do that.

MAARI: The personal investment in it ... whether that's different, or the same, or changed, or whatever.

MICHAEL: That's a very good point. I hadn't really thought of it so much in terms of *Insolent River* because we did it with everything. But that work was only the two of us.

CHRIS: *Is this revival going to be in sync with other work going on at the moment or will it stand out as being really different?*

MICHAEL: I imagine it's going to probably still stand out as being different.

LYNE: Somebody like Lemi Ponifasio and the work he is doing now, I suppose, gives it more of a context.

MICHAEL: But his work is becoming even more about high production values and has become very aestheticised.

LYNE: Operatic versus chamber.

CHRIS: *What's 'insolent' about the piece?*

MICHAEL: Its nakedness. Also the fact that the raw experience and emotion of it is there in front of you, it's not aestheticised.

LYNE: Insolence has a barb on the tail. If something's insolent it does bite you and I think this piece is really tough ... it's tough.

CHRIS: *So it's insolent in terms of its affect on the audience?*

LYNE: And the performer. What it requires, what it demands of the performer.

CHRIS: *And what about you, Michael, as the maker? Does that apply to you as well? As the maker, doesn't it bring in a kind of slightly masochistic element?*

LYNE: Wouldn't you say that Michael has always had a masochistic edge to his creative process! [laughter]

MICHAEL: I like insolence because it's a necessary refusal to toe the party line or be conventional. It's like a way of twisting, or like a queering almost.

MAARI: If I think of insolence I think of a sense of freedom. An insolent child is free, not constrained by acceptable behaviour. It's just going with what is quite raw and primal.

MICHAEL: Interestingly enough, now that I've started dancing tango, which I hadn't done at the time, I have a practica in Auckland, which is where we get together and practice tango. I have called my practice place and my website *Tango Insolente*, which is 'Insolent Tango'. It was only after I'd registered the domain name that I suddenly thought back, 'O damn it, I've already put *tango* and *insolent* together'. So that idea of insolence, even in the practice of tango, is still a way of approaching something to try and get to know it, but to critique it at the same time, or to twist it.

CHRIS: *What's 'river' a metaphor for?*

MICHAEL: Obviously for me it's the passing of life. It's the Heracleitean proverb 'you can't step into the same river twice'. It's evolution. It's constant change. The turbulence. But it's also a narrative thing. Rivers have beginnings, middles and ends. And of course, the elemental thing, which is the structural device of the work. And it's a meeting point of the two fundamental elements anyway, the earth and water. And rivers have opposing banks. The two dancers come from either side. It's this encounter with something else, something other.

CHRIS: *Did you talk like this with Lyne and Maari when you were making the piece?*

MICHAEL: Oh, I think so.

LYNE: Yeah.

CHRIS: *I'm always interested in how much performers know relative to the maker, and how much the maker relies on them knowing as much as possible. I remember having a conversation with Sue Healey in Australia about working with Nanette Hassel, with Sue saying she was horrified that Nanette said in a press article that dancers don't need to know more than what she decides to tell them. That all they need to do is just do the choreography...*

MICHAEL: You're calling me the maker, but I would say that I was the conceiver. This is relevant. That's why that wider information was vital because huge parts of the work are improvised, so the piece is made in the moment. There's some choreographed things in it. There's a structure. But it's absolutely vital that the dancers know what it's all about because they're making the work during the performance itself.

CHRIS: *And these new, young performers are going to have to draw on that capacity as well?*

MICHAEL: Absolutely.

CHRIS: ***Who are the dancers?***

MICHAEL: Josie Archer, Aloalii Tapu, Kosta Bogodievski and Emily Adams.

CHRIS: ***So they're going to have this kind of kind of conversation with you and be able to cope with it?***

MICHAEL: Oh, absolutely. Which is part of why I've chosen the people I have. Obviously I've chosen some of them physically. But I'm horrified at the moment at the number of dancers who are coming through some of the institutions who wouldn't be able to deal with these sorts of conversations. The people I'm working with, I've worked with in the past and I know that they're going to be fascinated and interested in this information as a source for participating in the work. But there are plenty of dancers around who I wouldn't feel comfortable or secure enough in trusting them with that sort of responsibility.

LYNE: My memory of it was that I don't remember those detailed conversations about this means that, or 'what is the metaphor for the choreographic structure of this work?' What I remember is absolutely understanding the world of the piece. In a way, it was a somatic world. It wasn't something that you had to get into the brain about. So it was a deep understanding of where the movement was coming from. What was appropriate, what was inappropriate. And the appropriateness of how the bodies related to one another. So the understanding was really somatic. But that had come from a really deep lot of training. It was totally ingrained in the physical practice.

MAARI: That's where it came from.

MICHAEL: It was basically following on from my work with Min Tanaka.

LYNE: It was more than that also. It was all of the trainings that we were accumulating.

CHRIS: ***What are the influences behind the work?***

MICHAEL: For me, when I think back, there were very specific things. Lyne's right, there was a whole world there. But there was the experience I had on the mountain in Min's training where I had to dig this shelf into this place to sit on the mountain, and it was raining for like 7 days of the 8 that we were there. Water pouring down. I was sitting on this rock, which is why there's a rock on stage, feeling as though I was in the middle of a waterfall. Just being so... not surrounded by the elements... but so IN the elements. In the rock, the mud, the rain and that sort of thing. It was out of that, that the elemental idea for the piece arose. And then also having seen in New York, *Tango Argentina*, which was the show that began the worldwide revival of tango. Tango had sort of died during the 60s and 70s and it was only done in a few clubs. These two Spanish theatre

designers found 7 couples of tango dancers, created this set for them, put them on stage and opened in Barcelona and then went to Paris and then came to New York. I just loved this entwinement of the bodies in tango and it related to a lot of the partnering stuff that Lyne and I had been doing. My own approach to movement was this partner form. They were the two immediate influences. In 1984 I saw *Tango Argentina*. On the way back I was in Japan. Then I came back to NZ for a short time and that's when we did the first version in 85. So it's this overlaying of this incredible profundity of the experience on the mountain and the elemental aspect of it, with this encounter with this partner-form of dance, which I was completely fascinated by.

CHRIS: ***How do you put a story of a personal experience on a mountain into a story of a relationship?***

MICHAEL: I think it's seeing the relationship thing in terms of the elemental aspect of the mountain experience.

LYNE: In partnership with nature.

CHRIS: ***And on a human level?***

MAARI: There was an element to that performance where, for me, I was so alone in my experience of it. And then we'd come together. It was a very strong experience for me of being in my own world at certain points in there.

CHRIS: ***Because you spent quite a bit of time buried under the mud?***

MAARI: Yeah. And I sort of see that the water... like in that previous question about the river... for me, I don't think of river, I think of my experience of the water. There was a sensuality about it. The mud. The water. It was very primal in many ways.

LYNE: This discussion around partnership is a key aspect. I think the work is really about trying to find relationship and I don't necessarily think that we got there. There is a kind of salvation at the end. I agree with you, Maari, because of the gruelling nature of the work you couldn't necessarily look to the partner on stage to support you. We were all working at the limit of our physicality. Yes there were moments when we came together, but I didn't necessarily feel like we came together to find our way through it. In the end we do. It was so intense that it wasn't an intensity that you were sharing together. There were moments of it, but generally it was about your own journey and this incredible search for what it means to be in partnership.

MICHAEL: Quite often in my life I've done a project or something where the significance and way of understanding it only arises later on. It's interesting that the piece has been called a *tango* and a *romance*. I think the piece is about desire. Desire is this search for something because we're incomplete. The piece is about

these half beings, or these incomplete entities that are trying to find otherness and it's hard, and it never works, and it's violent. It's like we're all cripples. And this is one cripple trying to find another cripple. That's how I understand it. Life is a force of seeking. Books just sit there. But living things, whether they're trees or whatever, are always seeking something to complete them.

LYNE: I think it's about connection.

MICHAEL: That's one of the things I was going to say too.

LYNE: This is a really great anecdote. Doing that show made me say to myself: 'I need a partner, I need a life'. It was a really profound feeling. I needed more. Because the piece demanded so much of me. And so on the final night, that's when Matu arrived. And that was that. That was love. Love came in. 4 months later I was pregnant. It was a huge shift. Because, you know, you and I, Michael, were about as close as two people could be. But we weren't lovers. And that was the yearning. So we were lovers on stage, but there was a yearning. And I think both of us were yearning. There was that trying to find the relational world off the stage. It was very much part of the piece for me.

MAARI: Interesting because for me it was the exact opposite. *Insolent River* was the catalyst that had me move away from the relationship I was in.

LYNE: But you were still desiring connection.

MAARI: It still had that influence. And the other thing about the piece is that it's had a huge ongoing influence on the rest of my life.

LYNE: Same.

MAARI: And I couldn't say that about any other piece I've ever been in. At times in my life when I'm really struggling with something, I go back to that... it's that rock.

MICHAEL: If I got through *Insolent River*, I can get through anything.

LYNE: That's right. But it's also about what's important in life and what are the choices. I made a very clear choice and it was about wanting relationship.

MAARI: It was bigger than just a performance.

CHRIS: *Does hearing the piece discussed in this way, Michael, help you in terms of how you're going to approach rehearsals with these new dancers?*

MICHAEL: A lot of it's coming back. My original feeling is I remember the piece, and I remember the incredible response to the piece. I've always wanted to do it again. But it is interesting being here with Lyne and Maari and talking about it all and remembering so many of the experiences of both making and performing it.

LYNE: That's why it was so profound for people.

MICHAEL: Yeah. It is vital that that aspect is not lost.

LYNE: There were no half measures. I still have people come up to me and go 'that was the most amazing thing I've ever seen'. That happens quite a lot. It's because we were spilling our guts on that stage every night. But actually, for me, I went 'is this too much'? Is your art

asking too much of you? It was very tough. Emotionally I got quite dishevelled from doing that project.

MAARI: It did for me too. But I think that was...

LYNE: ... that was what it was about.

MAARI: Yeah. Well it wouldn't have worked any other way. It's an all or nothing thing because it's an experience.

LYNE: So, Michael, if you go into this rehearsal and you don't ask that of those performers then will it be the same work? Or will it just be a piece of repertoire? It's interesting because I think what would help would be to have some support around that ritual for those people. That's what we didn't have. But I think it's doable. Do you know what I mean?

MICHAEL: Yeah, yeah.

MAARI: We did it without the support, but would having support have changed the piece?

LYNE: Maybe that's watering it down.

MICHAEL: One of the things that both Maari and Lyne talk about, and of course I had known this and forgotten it, was that on stage we were spilling our guts, that was the expression. So much of what we were doing was ... it wasn't acting, it was being. We created an environment and situations between the two dancers where you just had to do the damn thing, and that was enough, you didn't have to pretend or act. So a lot of the physicality of it was putting the body in gruelling situations that you just had to contend with. That goes for the whole piece and, as Lyne pointed out, even the making of the piece. But the piece itself ... what was it? 1 hour and 40 minutes? ... you were on stage 20 minutes before the audience come in and you never leave the stage. You're on every single moment. A lot of the actions that are going on are physically demanding. Right from 20 minutes under the earth, right through to the dancing, the marathon duet at the end. You're improvising. So it was incredibly demanding. It was a sort of *Grotowski-esque* or *butoh-esque* idea of 'it has to be real'.

LYNE: 'Spilling your guts' is maybe not the right metaphor. It's more about navigating the challenges. Navigating the really intense challenges.

CHRIS: *How does it compare to the real-time task-driven stuff that Judson Church were doing in New York in the 70s?*

MICHAEL: For me it comes more out of Artaud, Grotowski, butoh... Min Tanaka.

CHRIS: *Was it the first piece you made like that?*

MICHAEL: To that extent yes.

CHRIS: *Did you have some lead-up to it?*

MICHAEL: The first full-length solo piece I did, *Between Two Fires*, had similar themes.

CHRIS: *Did it have the elemental aspect?*

MICHAEL: Not so much, no.

LYNE: It did have the physical demand aspect.

CHRIS: ***The elemental thing is very much associated with butoh isn't it?***

MICHAEL: Yeah. And that was because it was just after I spent the time in Japan.

LYNE: The whole butoh practice, not just the experience on the mountain, informed the work.

CHRIS: ***Were you doing muscle and bone?***

MICHAEL: Yeah, yeah.

LYNE: Not just muscle and bone. It was all the pushing, discussion, manipulation work.

MICHAEL: We did lots and lots of training. In terms of what dancers do as a training practice, we did so much.

MAARI: I remember getting out of bed the following morning after the first time and I fell over, I literally couldn't walk. And then thinking 'I've got to somehow get there and go through this again'. That was the beginning of me realising 'my god, this isn't just training for a performance, this is a full body commitment'. There were lots of episodes like that.

LYNE: There's lots of juxtapositions in the work too, though. There was the whole Fred Astaire / Frank Sinatra, Fred Astaire / Ginger Rogers thing. There was the Hawkins technique, which was definitely part of it as well. The Alexander technique. Release technique. The whole raft of training that had been going on underneath it. Traditional Japanese dance. The Japanese aesthetic.

CHRIS: ***These weren't things that were commonplace at the time, were they? Or were they well established?***

MAARI: I think when we did it, it was completely new.

LYNE: It was the arrival of *butoh* into NZ.

MICHAEL: There hadn't been any *butoh* stuff. Even when we did it in 1988, that was really the introduction of MB [Muscle and Bone] into NZ.

LYNE: MB now is just kind of taken as being fundamental in people's training. But actually, it came from somewhere. It came from Michael's experience in Japan.

CHRIS: ***How long did you spend with Min?***

MICHAEL: I worked with him in various places. We did a workshop together in New York and then out of that I went to Japan for two months. The mountain thing was the end or culmination of that.

CHRIS: ***Why did you change it from tango to romance? Romance is quite a specific thing. Was it the nature of the relationship between you and Lyne?***

MICHAEL: No, not at all. I was just wanting to acknowledge that it was a different piece. So it was the same, it was *Insolent River*, but it was also different. The idea did occur to give the new TEMPO version another name, but because I have now become a tango dancer and because *Insolent River: The Tango* was the first manifestation, I decided to go back to that. For me, *tango* and *romance* are similes. The common thing is desire and this search for otherness.

CHRIS: ***It's not sexual desire you're talking about, or is it?***

MICHAEL: Well I think sexual desire is an epiphenomenon of a bigger desire. That's what the piece does. It starts with this cosmic desire, which is the breathing inside the two sides of the bank. Then slowly these creatures, these blind animal creatures emerge. I have a feeling that we kept our eyes closed until we find each other. So it's very non-human. It's all on the floor, slithering around. It's like something that comes from a cosmic place, and as it comes through the elements, it comes into very quotidian, daily reality. Sexual desire becomes a part of that. Then it goes back out to a cosmic thing again. So it's like a zoom in on an actual tangible couple. But the whole thing is about desire right from the beginning. Even to the flying through space, it's a seeking for something that can never be attained.

CHRIS: ***In the two original versions, what makes them different? What specifically changed?***

MICHAEL: Well, the most obvious thing is that the music was completely different. And the physical dialogue between Maari and me was very different from Lyne and me. We did have a video of it didn't we?

MAARI: We did. I actually have a copy of that video. Terrible as it is.

MICHAEL: So I must have a copy of that video too.

CHRIS: ***You saw Lyne and Michael's version didn't you Maari?***

MAARI: Well, that's the thing I was going to mention, actually. When you're talking about relationships. At a real guttural level, that relationship stuff... and this is going to sound really strange... is that to watch it, because it was so intense to perform, it felt to me like a betrayal of a relationship...

MICHAEL: *[Laughs]* That's interesting.

MAARI: I know that's going to sound really bizarre. But that's what it felt like. My god, that's... you know, that's...

LYNE: The slut!

MAARI: Yeah. It was like being hit in the gut and I wasn't expecting that.

LYNE: I can understand that.

MAARI: I thought about that as I was walking here thinking, 'Can I actually say that? It sounds a bit out there'. But that's what it felt like to watch. It was like, 'My god, the intensity of what we had and now you're

replicating it with someone else! How can you do that!

LYNE: It's like having sex with somebody else.

MAARI: Yeah. I don't know where that came from.

CHRIS: *So it reflects that deeply invested quality you've all been talking about, which would explain the feeling of betrayal?*

MAARI: Yeah. It wasn't at an intellectual level though. It was deeper than that. It wouldn't matter if it was Lyne or anyone else, it was beneath that. It was about the whole experience of it. It was watching it and knowing what it felt like to have that sort of intensity of interconnectedness of bodies.

CHRIS: *But perhaps more than anyone else, Maari, you would recognise differences between your version and theirs?*

MAARI: Yes. I could definitely recognise them. It's quite hard to be specific now.

MICHAEL: I think Lyne and my one probably had more aggression in it because it was our relationship. So it was probably a bit more emotional. Maari and I had been great friends, but we didn't have a relationship like Lyne and I had.

LYNE: Well we had been having a romance for awhile. For a couple of years. We'd shared a lot of really deep experiences that probably you hadn't had with Maari. We'd been travelling and living together.

MICHAEL: Maari and I did have a shared background. At school, we had a company. There was Michelle Richecoeur, Maari and me. We worked together all the time.

LYNE: So you knew each other really well.

MICHAEL: And then I went away and I came back and Michelle had gone to the UK. So I had a history with Maari and I knew that if I was wanting to do anything as outrageous as this, that Maari would be the only person that I could do it with because we did have a past. It wasn't that I just chose this ballerina from school. She had already committed herself to a project that we had done previously.

LYNE: We're very different personalities.

CHRIS: *The piece you are making now, is it going to be a hybrid of the two earlier versions?*

MICHAEL: Well I've chosen two couples who I think will spark off each other and who are compatible and comparable. I think that the physical energy and compatibility of the two dancers is important. But now that I think about the earlier discussion regarding the sexual politics of the piece, that might be what people were reading.

LYNE: Because of the different physical personalities between me and Maari?

MICHAEL: Yeah... because I was bigger than Maari, so it possibly looked like I was dominant.

LYNE: Maari, you were just a wee slip of a thing.

MICHAEL: She was. And that was what was also impressive. She had to carry me on her back from one end of the stage to another on this really slow step. That was actually an element of it that was the physical differential between us. Yet she was this tiny little ballerina girl who stood up to me and carried me and fought with me and danced with me. Whereas Lyne and I were much more physically compatible and so it probably had a...

LYNE: ... different kind of reading.

MICHAEL: This one's going to be more emotional. This one's going to be quite surprising because of the physical differences between us.

CHRIS: *So you've matched similar physicalities with your new dancers?*

MICHAEL: Yeah I have.

LYNE: But even that though, the fact that you've got two couples doing it on different nights. Immediately it's become something else. Each pair is going to have a reflection of themselves in another couple, so they're going to be able to view it from the outside. It's also like a cell dividing. Now you've got the next generation of four versus the original one of two. It's a bit like the DNA of it spreading out.

MICHAEL: And interestingly, two of the dancers are a couple, but they're not dancing together. They're in opposite casts.

LYNE: Who's the couple?

MICHAEL: Kosta and Josie are an item.

LYNE: They are very different from one another physically. Josie's quite tall.

MICHAEL: Josie's tall and big and Amazon-like, like Sarah Jane Howard. Emily and Kosta are in the same cast and are compatible in terms of size.

CHRIS: *Do you think the piece will seem dated after all this time?*

MICHAEL: I don't know. It's a gamble.

LYNE: It's really hard to answer that. Michael's got the map but he won't know what it's going to be like until he gets in the room.

CHRIS: *Who came up with the idea of reviving it?*

MICHAEL: Oh, me. Absolutely. It's been my dream to do it in Auckland from way back.

CHRIS: *Why?*

MICHAEL: Because I think it's a great piece. I think it's an awesome piece.

CHRIS: *So you think it will sit as comfortably today as it did previously?*

MICHAEL: I'm hoping it will. I've had three pieces that people have written to me about saying that they

'changed their life' sort of thing. *Insolent River, A Long Undressing* and *Jerusalem*. I've made other things that I think are more integrated dance works. *Dark Forest* for instance. But these three pieces really grab people by the guts.

LYNE: The work's got some really surprising elements in it that don't probably need to be revealed. But they are unusual, weird choices, bizarre.

MICHAEL: Some of it is quite funny. It sounds as though it is incredibly intense all the time, but there's a lot of humour in it.

LYNE: It's a bizarreness that you won't see anybody doing these days. Like really kind of taking risks with the form. Whacky!

MICHAEL: The question of whether it is going to be relevant today? Who knows! I don't know. I'm hoping it will be and I'm going to try to make it relevant.

LYNE: That's one of the interesting things about putting a 30 year old work in front of an audience. What will happen? Who knows what will happen!

MICHAEL: The supporting evidence is that the version I created with Maari was reproducible when I did it later with Lyne. It worked.

CHRIS: *The other thing that's interesting from earlier in our discussion is if the dancers aren't involved with all the stuff that goes on around the project, how might that affect their version of it and their ability to do it justice?*

LYNE: Michael, you must be... not concerned, but that is a really valid point. We were so immersed in the total experience.

MAARI: I think that from my perspective as a performer in it, all that stuff was as much a part of it.

LYNE: Yeah. It came out of that.

MICHAEL: It gave it the epic quality.

LYNE: We couldn't have made it without being that immersed. It would have simply been a performance. It wouldn't have been... I don't know. It's a good challenge.

CHRIS: *So the piece is actually larger than the hour and 40 minutes we see on stage? It starts way before and finishes way after?*

MICHAEL: Oh, absolutely.

LYNE: Because it involves a real commitment to working and training in a particular way.

CHRIS: *But not for these dancers? Not for this version?*

LYNE: Well, I don't now. We know Kosta and Josie are on their own track with their own work. I know Emily is also on her own independent track. I don't know about the other guy.

MICHAEL: Aloalii. Even for him he has other things happening. He's been to Europe and he's come back and he's taken on a job as a school teacher. We're going

to be rehearsing from 4.30 to 10 o'clock at night, and also Saturday and Sunday. Aloalii will be working with kids all day and then have to come to the studio every night. I've got these two different casts. They're going to be overlapping. Even that's a commitment.

CHRIS: *The question here is to do with how activities that are not directly related to a project or a training affect it. For you, Michael, you go over to Japan to learn butoh, but Min gets you to climb a mountain in the rain or grow vegetables. Or you all have to paint floors, shovel soil and put up posters. All of which feed directly back into the dance outcomes and performance training.*

MICHAEL: Exactly.

CHRIS: *These dancers, however, are not going to have this breadth of outside experience with the work, except perhaps through their deep commitments to their separate independent pathways?*

MICHAEL: It's not the same as being part of the bigger project of creating the thing. But that is an interesting question.

MAARI: I think the dancers' experience of that broader dimension will be different. Not better or worse, just different.

LYNE: Maybe the strength of the work now is in another incarnation. Is it a piece of repertoire? I suppose where I got to in my thinking on all of this is that people shouldn't have to go through such extremes to put on a work like this. That that kind of experience is not really that great, ultimately. So maybe now is an opportunity to have these really great artists come in and find that world, give their all physically, but be supported in ways that we weren't. I don't think it will necessarily be a bad thing.

MAARI: Personally, I'm actually glad that I went through it. That I experienced it the way that I did. For myself.

LYNE: After that work, honestly, I thought 'well why would you ever want to do anything again?' That's it. You've done the ultimate. How could anything possibly ever compare?

MAARI: And that's exactly how I felt about it too.

CHRIS: *How did Insolent River change your life, Maari?*

MAARI: It strengthened me internally in a way that I could never have been strengthened to cope with a number of really big issues that have happened to me since then. Of all the other things I could go back to, all the other places I could gain strength, that's what I go back to. *That* experience is my rock.

CHRIS: *And when you say 'that', what do you mean in particular?*

MAARI: The whole creative process. And the

performance as well. I just sort of see it as a complete experience. I don't see the creative part and then the performance. It's like that rock that sits at the end of the river.

MICHAEL: It's actually interesting. Lyne went on to have a baby and I went on to have a tumour. What Maari's describing is really interesting, because for me my version of Maari's experience of *Insolent River* is the mountain. When I was going through the cancer and this huge tumour and looking for a surgeon, the thing that got me through was the fact that I got through those 8 days on the mountain. I discovered this inner strength that I never knew I had and I said to myself 'If I can put up with that...!' I could have left at any stage and come down to base camp. It's interesting that's where the piece came from. It's this thing that you get a sense of achievement and self-discovery in it.

LYNE: It definitely opened something up didn't it.

MICHAEL: It's sort of like taking all those elemental forces and saying 'I'm part of those'. 'I can take the power of water and earth'. Rather than this separation of the poor little human and the cosmos, sort of thing. That the cosmic forces come through us and we can use them. I know that sounds a bit... [all laugh]

LYNE: It was big!

CHRIS: **All of you are talking about a major experiential dimension that was deeply transforming.**

LYNE: Well the thing is that Michael put this stake in the ground and asked us to go there, and we went there. We were on a journey. The piece is about a journey. The audience goes on a journey. No choice.

CHRIS: **OK, the audience. Obviously the piece has done so much for you in terms of inner revelations and the fact that you got through it, etc., but if I'm sitting there as an audience member, what is it doing for me?**

MICHAEL: That's what I was saying before. People did respond on that level. They did experience something.

LYNE: We had one bad review where somebody called us 'lesbians rolling around in the mud'. [all laugh]

MICHAEL: I use that expression all the time. Occasionally I see dance stuff and I'll say, 'It looks a bit like lesbian mud-wrestling to me'. [laughs] Although I'm not even sure that the criticism was a negative thing. One of the things I'm interested, though, is to see if the dancers I'm going to be working with can draw on stuff from their own lives. That's something I'd like to do.

LYNE: They're about the same age as we were aren't they?

MICHAEL: Yeah, so they're at this certain time of their lives, which was a big part of it for us.

MAARI: I think I would have been 24.

LYNE: Yeah, a bit younger than Michael and I were. It was definitely about whatever was at the front of that time of your life. And there are different things at the

front at different times in your lives.

MICHAEL: Well, it's about not being completely formed yet as a person. There's a certain naivety about the piece. It's about dreamers. It's about people who have this dream and the dreams just constantly get frustrated. It's this desire which can never be fulfilled. You were asking 'is it still going to be surprising?' In that sense, I think it probably still will, if I can re-capture the same degree of performative focus or intensity or there-ness.

CHRIS: **The intensity of what you all experienced and the struggle behind it keep coming up a lot in the discussion. That seems to be a key factor that you say is integral to Insolent River's success. While technical skills now are really high, I can't say that I often see dancers these days pushing physical and emotional boundaries in performance in the way you describe. Much of what I see seems smooth and virtuosic in its execution rather than raw. There's a kind of professional coolness to everything that might be coming out of institutional dance training. Can you say more about this newer generation's readiness for this kind of work and challenge?**

LYNE: I was just thinking about how they've all been immersed in a whole different training. It's not as if they haven't been immersed in a training, it just hasn't been a particular dialogue between the maker and the other performer. But they are all highly trained.

MAARI: They're highly exposed to things. I remember, Michael, when you first mentioned what we were or weren't going to be wearing for it. I was like, 'Oh, ah ok!' But back then that was new. That wasn't that common.

CHRIS: **So you just had a g-string?**

MAARI: G-string. And then a dress. Which was on and off because it got all wet. But that was quite different then.

CHRIS: **The nudity, the body thing?**

MICHAEL: Yeah.

MAARI: Now that's much more common.

LYNE: But it's part of it isn't it. It's what they're going to be like with it that's the question. It's up to them how much they want to bring to it, really, isn't it?

MICHAEL: I have complete faith in the four people that I've chosen. There's not one of the four that I'm thinking 'mmm, damn, I wish I could spend more time with them just to make sure'.

LYNE: And then there's that challenge for you as the maker to trust them and to give them enough information so they're invited into the world of the piece. And how much information do you give them?

CHRIS: **It's great that this piece is being done again. We don't see a lot of dance get revived like this. You've got a big repertoire, Michael, so you can select great pieces from different periods. But it's**

not a common practice. It's not something that happens here. It's all about turn over.

MICHAEL: This is also a difficult piece to recreate because it requires traverse staging. I wouldn't imagine doing it any other way. And the set is expensive and complicated. It's not easy. So I'm really really thrilled that we've got this opportunity to do it. But I like Lyne's idea that could be put towards TEMPO, that they revive a classic every year.

MAARI: A heritage piece.

LYNE: Yeah. A heritage piece is really good.

CHRIS: It's acknowledging legacy and keeping legacy alive.

LYNE: It is. It is important.

CHRIS: Before I switch the recorder off, does anyone want to say anything finally about it?

LYNE: [*mischievously*] I'm really glad I was part of it. [*laughter*] It was an amazing thing. I found love. [*laughter*] It completely changed my life.

MAARI: Yeah. It did. It hit me over the head and hit me in the guts in a really big way.

LYNE: I made a decision on the final night of *Insolent River* that I'm still resonating with.

MICHAEL: My one profound thought brings in another angle. One found love, one separated, for me it was about finding someone to go through this with. It was like a relationship. Finding someone - Maari and then Lyne - who trusted me enough to go through this ordeal with. For me that was what was so special about it. That we did this thing. That's what the piece is about.

LYNE: You needed good solid partners to do that work.

MICHAEL: Yeah. And that out of both of the times we did it, it was an incredibly rewarding and satisfying experience.

LYNE: Albeit difficult.

MAARI: But I think I will always have a relationship with *Insolent River: A Tango*. That's what it feels like for me.

LYNE: Recently I made quite a strong decision to step away from dance, actually. That takes me back to a decision I made at the end of that piece to keep trusting where new decisions lead me. So its influence is still with me 30 years later.

CHRIS: Did any of you miss the experience you had with this piece afterwards?

MAARI: For me it was like that was it. Nothing ever measured up. Nothing would ever come anywhere close to that experience.

LYNE: Everything else was ok, but wasn't the same. It was the peak... as a performance, it was the peak.

MAARI: I actually think that afterwards I went... I wouldn't say it was like a depression, but it was a really hard feeling of withdrawal. It was a really precious experience. In some ways I suppose it was like having a partner that died and that was it.

LYNE: It was like a full-stop.

MAARI: I don't need anything to come close to that anymore.

MICHAEL: There is something that we haven't talked about and that is you also have an incredibly intimate relationship with the audience. There are things that are addressed to the audience. They are right there with their feet almost dangling into the set. You're wandering around with your butt in the air with a g-string on and so it was incredibly exposing. Because of the light, it's not a black wall, there are faces there. We don't perform as if they're not there. There are times when things are addressed to the audience.

LYNE: Yeah, there's text in it.

MICHAEL: And we didn't have an alternate cast. That was even more pressure. How many shows did we do?

LYNE: Eight in a row.

MICHAEL: It's a lot to do that and then to do it again and to do it again.

LYNE: I remember waking up in the morning and having to start psyching myself up as soon as I woke up. The whole time was spent psyching yourself up. And then you work through and you finish by 11, go home, go to sleep.

MICHAEL: And then it would all start again.

LYNE: And then you get up... There was nothing else going on. That was the realisation for me for the future, that I didn't want that.

CHRIS: We haven't said anything about what it felt like lying under the soil at the start, how long were you lying there for?

MICHAEL: 20 minutes.

LYNE: I was focussing on one breath at a time.

MAARI: It got colder and wetter. That's what I remember. It was because of all the water that was being used.

MICHAEL: Colder and wetter, I remember that.

LYNE: I found it very uncomfortable. It was just a meditation.

MAARI: By the end of the last show, the mud was sodden and cold, and wet. And it got more and more like that.

CHRIS: No-one got sick?

LYNE: No.

MICHAEL: We didn't actually.

LYNE: We probably did afterwards.

MAARI: I remember being really cold and shaking.

MICHAEL: We didn't get sterilised mud or anything did we? We just went to a garden place. Now it's got to be sterilised.

LYNE: It was a meditation. Just to stay there so you didn't actually come out of the mud.

MICHAEL: Well that was almost a replication of the experience on the mountain. Of just being there. You just had to accept what was there.

LYNE: It was very Zen. Very Buddhist.

MICHAEL: Yeah, it is.

MAARI: You could hear people coming in.

LYNE: One moment at a time. Being totally present. It's like that when you're giving birth. It was a good training for giving birth. [*laughter from the 2 women*]

MICHAEL: Even though it wasn't planned that way, it's hard to imagine you could go into that piece without having done that. [Others: Mmmm.] You actually need to do that to go into that state for the whole first section of moving towards each other.

LYNE: To have some kind of meditation technique.

MICHAEL: Yeah. You can't just go down and lie in the mud and then go into it.

LYNE: No. It was part of the process.

MICHAEL: You have to come from some other place to get into the sort of searching thing.

MAARI: Yeah. It was part of that alone-ness.

LYNE: The thing is we shouldn't reveal about the mud because some people came to that show who had no idea the dancers were under the mud and that was really amazing, I think. They were really shocked when someone started moving.

MICHAEL: I remember Sally Stockworth coming up to me afterwards and saying, 'I went in there and I sat there and I said I know Parmenter's going to trick us, where

are they going to come from?' And she was sitting there and it was right underneath her feet. [*laughs*] She had no idea that we were there.

LYNE: We shouldn't reveal that, I don't think.

CHRIS: ***So what triggered the start of the piece? How did you know 20 minutes were up?***

MICHAEL: Music. Sound.

CHRIS: ***So you could hear quite clearly under there?***

LYNE: A little bit muffled. We had a plastic tube for breathing. We were buried not too far under.

MICHAEL: But it was quite a ritual actually. You could hear the voices of the two people we had patting it down. We're both getting done at the same time.

LYNE: So you're going up to Auckland, Maari, to see the show?

MAARI: Definitely.