



When Rachel Wesson, Artistic Director of Ascendance Rep, invited me to make a new choreographic work for cathedrals I could not resist the site specific challenge of working in such ancient beautiful spaces; when she told me that it was a tour of 17 cathedrals (I had assumed 2 or 3) the challenge became even more interesting. I had already been in dialogue with Clarinetist Dave White about making a new work using the Mozart Clarinet Quintet and I knew that this commission presented the perfect opportunity. Rachel and I agreed that I would visit all the cathedrals prior to starting work on the piece for creative research and inspiration and to explore where I would place the work in each cathedral; this began a journey that has been a delight and an education in the unique integration of art and architecture that these historic buildings hold for us.

Cathedrals are, in some ways, natural theatres with the congregation/audience facing east towards the 'stage' at the top of the nave and this became my choice of space for the performance in most of the cathedrals as it seemed perverse to ignore such beautiful architectural presentation and framing, particularly when our requests to move seating and other cathedral furniture was met with such generosity and support. Making a new choreographic work that will be suitable for 17 different spaces requires a very different approach to a one off site specific event; and while I wanted to retain the quality of a special event at each cathedral it became clear that the choreography would have to use a generic and repeated form that adapted to the spatial demands and qualities of each cathedral.

As a contemporary choreographer I have worked in many different kinds of landscapes outside of traditional theatres, including galleries, roof tops, parks, streets, offices, a railway station, warehouses, on rivers, in the sea etc. The craft of site specific performance requires an artist to approach each site with particular questions: what are the site's social, cultural, historical, aesthetic, spatial, environmental or functional qualities? How can my work relate to or be inspired by these qualities? To what extent will the site/context become part of my choreographic 'score'? Approaching cathedrals with these questions was extremely interesting and, of course, very complex as the environment one is investigating is usually between 700-1000 years old and some of the cathedrals have foundations that are much older. The layered visual backdrops of Saxon, Norman, Early English, Gothic or Renaissance architecture were extraordinary to research, but also a rich mix from which my gaze wandered to much smaller examples of historical narrative or image in the carved misericords, windows and gargoyles which have inspired moments in the movement language. I chose the title – Standing Stones – to link the work to older spiritual cultures, to sculptural forms, to the idea of stillness in dance and to the architectural endurance of cathedrals.

The form of the Mozart Clarinet Quintet provides a structural template for the choreography which uses the 4 movements – Allegro, Larghetto, Minuetto, Tema con Variazioni to create four different linked episodes to the performance. It is no surprise that I should be drawn to use this beautiful arrangement for clarinet and piano, as Mozart, like many 18th century composers, was inspired by dance forms such as minuets, gavottes, courantes, sarabandes; it has been a joy to work with the changing emotional textures and playfulness of variations within the music.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the dancers Daniela Ferreira, Ayano Honda, Katie Keeble, and Paul Wilkinson; the musicians Jonathan Delbridge and Dave White; our lighting designer Michael Mannion and costume design collaborator Emma Hopkinson for their outstanding contributions.