

## **dyad Zoom Artists' Talk May 2021: Question 1**

*Dramaturg Katalin Trencsényi: "What were the main ideas that you wanted to explore with this piece?"*

*Justine Doswell:*

"To better contextualise the work I need to rewind to the very beginning, to its source. As you know it began in 2019, I was supported by an Arts Council Bursary to further develop my choreographic practice. I decided to take Johann Sebastian Bach's monumental work, The Art of Fuge, into the studio. The initial idea being to respond to its notation, use elements of the musical score as a framework to generate, experiment and play with. Based on a single 12 note theme The Art of Fuge is a complex exploration of counterpoint, In music, counterpoint is the relationship between two or more musical lines (or voices) which are harmonically interdependent yet independent in rhythm and melodic contour. This led us to nature's golden ratio, the golden section, divine proportion and sacred geometry. Questions arose about faith, about trust. Conversations about belief systems and practices that related humanity to spirituality.. within religion but also related social and cultural structures.

I was interested to learn that Bach initialled both his liturgical and secular scores with S.D.G. Soli Deo Gloria, To the Glory of God Alone. And it was this, the catalyst, that brought back memories of times spent living with my father in South East Asia, Malaysia and Indonesia, multi-cultural, multi religious societies, however Muslim majority countries. Powerful memories of the daily calls to prayer, the Adhan and my first visit to a Mosque at the age of 13. This was my personal point of connection, the planting of this idea of a contrapuntal embodiment as a possible exploration of monotheism.

Early 2020 before the pandemic broke in Ireland I spoke to Dean Morton about the possibility of dance being presented in the Lady Chapel of St Patrick's Cathedral, it's the national Cathedral of the island of Ireland, North and South, of the Church of Ireland. And during the months that followed, an accidental chance meeting with Imam Ismail in my neighbourhood led to a phone call with Shaykh Dr Umar Al-Qadri. It was during this conversation, speaking of the Lady Chapel, that the Shaykh informed me of the exalted place that Maryam | Mary holds

in Islam and the significance and connection of Mary | Maryam in Christianity and Islam, he spoke particularly of her role as a bridge-builder between the traditions and that struck a powerful chord with me. How we are interconnected in ways that often we are not aware of.

It was very important to me, to approach the work with utmost sensitivity and respect. In its nature, immense, ubiquitous, highly complex and multifaceted.

The Virgin Mary | Maryam, a sacred feminine archetype, a paradigm of purity and piety, an exemplar, venerated as the perfect woman with quintessential qualities, aspects of which have influenced and dictated women's lives and roles in the structure of societies over many centuries.

With your help and all involved, the research was extensive and we unearthed a diverse multitude of perspectives that gave such insight and helped navigate the eventual distillation of the work. The experience of making this was at times so far removed from me and at others times extremely personal, overwhelmingly. One task I remember in particular during the research was when I reached out to as many people as I could and with their help and their extended circles asked people to share what Mary | Maryam meant to them, their thoughts, lived experiences, memories, or just associatively.

You see, for me, it was always about finding a way to express, to hold the unity and plurality. To somehow embody, to multi-layer this within the bodies, the presence, the beings of Justine and Salma in this holy site, one that has been a place of spiritual encounter for countless generations.

It's been a very personal journey for me and I'm still processing all that has surfaced and also not. I mean, this to me still feels like the beginning of something that I would like to, that I definitely intend to keep exploring."