



SCOPE TO DREAM – Helen Herbertson

By Andrea Viney

For over 50 years, Helen Herbertson has been telling stories with dance. Like many artists, her passion began with a pair of ballet slippers at the age of five and remains as strong as ever.

Growing up in an era where tertiary dance training courses did not exist and it was rare to make a living from dance, Helen has maintained a career in and around the industry for over 30 years. From Primary Teaching to Ushering, Helen remarks that she has done 'anything and everything' to support herself while enjoying an exciting freelance career as a choreographer, performer and creative collaborator.

Things have certainly not slowed down in the past couple of decades. If anything, her dance career is more intense now than it was when she was younger, with touring and performing still on the horizon. Helen is currently working on two shows to be premiered at the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts; her own new collaboration with Ben Cobham, *Sunstruck*, and Writer/Director Jenny Kemp's new work, *Kitten*. When she is not choreographing, Helen can be found at the Faculty of VCA, University of Melbourne, where she coordinates the Post Graduate and Honours dance programs.

Helen comments that the hardest thing a dancer will face in their career is a change in their physical ability. Helen knows this phase well. 'As you get older and can't physically do what you used to, it's easy to stop or become complacent,' she says. But when the passion is still there, Helen says it is important to have a support network to keep you moving. As a 2008 SCOPE participant Helen says 'SCOPE is providing a different kind of support' at this stage of her career, but one that she is extremely grateful for. 'I anticipate being in the business a long time, so to be able to imagine the next ten years in the industry is great.'

She has enjoyed the moments when all the SCOPE participants meet up as a group to discuss their progress. 'You realise other people are dealing with exactly the same things – it's really interesting.' Helen says the support and encouragement from her SCOPE advisor and the other participants ensures that she is 'never narrowing the band'.

From regular conversations with her SCOPE advisor, Helen has been encouraged to sit and dream about the possibilities. 'Having someone there to bounce ideas off and ask those questions about your future – who you are, what you want and what's needed next – is very helpful. I've been able to think about my experience and skill set... and what 'could be' as opposed to what is.'

Helen says it's the simplicity in SCOPE she has really responded to. 'It is so very wide and yet particular – it lets you be in a very focused, detailed place but also think broadly about the big picture.' She likes the freedom of being able to imagine without any pressure. 'It is not about answers or criteria, just the strength of that one to one conversation with your SCOPE Advisor to open you up to things you might not have considered.' Through SCOPE, Helen has had some help and advice exploring her interest in dance history and archiving. Her goal is to write and publish at some point in the future. 'Being able to mark the skills I have and understand how they can be reconfigured is so valuable'.

Helen admits that it has taken her a while to understand that it is okay not to know what's next, but that the possibilities are endless. 'You can't do anything unless you can imagine yourself doing it first – SCOPE has allowed me to imagine what is possible,' she says.

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