

JUST KEEP ON SLOW DANCING

On The Intervention of Loneliness by
Ming Poon

In his participative performance on loneliness, choreographer Ming Poon invites audience members to the stage to slow dance with him, and later with each other.

In this text, Beatrix Joyce recalls her experience of the show, her impromptu dances with strangers and a few thoughts that came up in the post-show talk moderated by Sandra Strauch.

Text commissioned by the artist.

The unfamiliar, shampoo-y smell of a stranger. A stranger who, after exchanging one or two words and a smile, has now gently put their arms around me. In turn, I wrap my arms around them. The music in our headphones – a song only we can hear - starts and a slow dance ensues with someone I've never met before. Their cheeks, their chest, their hands on my back. It's an intimacy shared in an awkward moment of thrown-togetherness.

This was my experience after having somewhat nervously volunteered to jump on stage with other unwitting audience members during Ming Poon's *The Intervention of Loneliness*. The show was built on a simple premise: can we transform our loneliness with a dance? Artist and director Ming Poon spent many cold days outside in Berlin's public spaces, carrying a cardboard sign that invited passersby to dance with him. With his accumulated experience of rejection, solitude, vulnerability and connection, he built a collaborative theatre experience that reinstated the notion of loneliness as a starting point for action and a transformative space of exchange.

The request to join lonely Poon onstage was met by a brave participant, who was the first to accept his invitation and melt into his embrace with the aid of a secret song. A series of youthful female-appearing persons followed, a trend soon broken by people of all genders and all ages gradually taking to the stage and joining the random constellation of courageous audience members looking for dance partners. Questions, such as "What is loneliness to you?" were asked through the headphones. People shared their answers, their thoughts and personal stories via the microphones on stage, opening a reflective space to together ponder this deeply complex, yet persistently universal emotion.

The performance culminated in a scene with audience-members-turned-performers scattered across the stage, dancing with an imaginary dance partner. In the post-show talk afterwards, an audience member who had braved the stage, asked how this – what they thought to be a highly aesthetic scene – looked to those left in the auditorium. Was it beautiful?

Image: Eduardo Mattos. Description on next page.



Many forthcoming answers followed suit, filling them in on perspectives from different seats, different viewpoints. Ming Poon referred to this multiplicity of perspectives as essential – it is his intention to ensure that each audience member has a completely different experience. This makes the work porous and multifaceted – a coexistence of associations and rhythms, never quite aligned but never quite opposed either.

When asked whether there was a Plan B to the performance – or in other words – what he would have done had no one joined him – Ming Poon replied that the baseline is simple: it is just him, with his cardboard sign and his big, hopeful eyes, waiting for something to happen. He says he has faith in whichever outcome, as he has run the performance through many test audiences, and he has long since familiarised himself with all the possible things that could go wrong. At the same time, he maintains a close relationship with failure: sometimes it's a yes, sometimes it's a no. Even when the piece turned into a *vrai spectacle* full of sparked joy and shared melancholy, its backstory of bitter rejections from the street remained tangible. It's these sharp edges of real, lived experience, and the soft utopia of a naïve and child-like desire to connect with **any body**, that reaches far beyond the stage into the bar where people look each other in the eyes like they could, as moderator Sandra Strauch said when closing the evening, “just keep on slow dancing”.

Image description:

10 audience members of different ages and genders standing in a line at the back of the stage, holding cardboard “Dance with me” signs in different languages, of which two are couples embracing and slow-dancing. One audience member, male-presenting, at the front, holding the sign in French and looking over their shoulder to their right. Artist Ming Poon at the back in the centre, holding a sign and looking happy.