

## Interview with Matthias Sperling from Siobhan Davies new work *Minutes*

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Summary:

*Minutes*, a new work by Siobhan Davies created with Catherine Bennett, Matteo Fargion, Henry Montes, Deborah Saxon and Matthias Sperling, part of the project *The Collection*

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*Minutes*, a new work by Siobhan Davies created with Catherine Bennett, Matteo Fargion, Henry Montes, Deborah Saxon and Matthias Sperling premiered at the Victoria Miro Gallery, London in March/April, as part of the project *The Collection*. Performed continuously for six hours each day, the work is juxtaposed with *Doldrum* by the artist Anri Sala, which comprises a drum programmed to produce its own rhythm which in turn is taken from a piece previously performed by Siobhan Davies.

If you missed it in London you can see it as it evolves into a new collaboration with IKON Gallery in Birmingham from September 24 - October 4, 2009. Dance UK is delighted that Matthias Sperling has offered an interview with insight into his involvement in creating and dancing in the piece. Remember to let us know your thoughts and comments on our Facebook page.

**DanceUK:** Tell me about your process in the studio, how did you get to this point?

**Matthias Sperling:** I looked for an activity and a mode of performance that would create a comfortable shared space and time in the gallery, both for myself and for viewers. With viewers arriving at any point and co-habiting space with the performance, I was keen to find an approach that would encourage people to feel that their presence is an essential and welcome part of the work, rather than an intrusion on it. My solution arrived in the form of a solo practice that works primarily with the idea of "seeing" music in movement. I developed a set of very limited movement behaviours and use variations within these to physicalise a kind of internally heard music, accompanied only by the rhythmic ticking of seconds on a metronome that I place beside me. The "music" itself is only manifested visibly, not audibly, and isn't a reference to an existing piece of music. It's more of a rhythmic and melodic journey that gives me a specific concentration, gives definition to my movement and hopefully allows the viewer to enter into and on some level make sense of my activity.

**DU:** How does the gallery space differ from the physical spaces in which you have performed? How did you find the transition between dance studio and gallery space?

**MS:** I've really enjoyed the way that working in a new environment has forced me to pay closer attention to the space as a player in the work. The gallery at Victoria Miro 14 is a stunning space with very particular cultural, architectural, logistical and aesthetic dimensions to consider and enjoy. In parallel with the way that visual artworks usually inhabit a gallery space, I was interested in carefully considering how the work is sited in that space while not making a work about the space. It was a real pleasure to spend the whole week prior to the opening working in the gallery, and I really felt myself settling into its parameters over that time. Hopefully, that not only

allowed us to learn how to make the best practical use of the space, but also let an “at home” quality sink into us that we can pass on to viewers entering the gallery.

**DU:** Do you feel there is a difference in your relation to the audience in the gallery?

**MS:** My relationship with the audience certainly feels more intimate, immediate and in some ways more equal than in a theatre setting. The gallery setting gives the viewer an essential role in building the performance space from moment to moment, and that’s something that I remain palpably aware of in performance. Each time I enter the space, I encounter a different number of people, who have chosen to watch from different places in the room. Whether they’re standing right on the spot that I’m heading to or on the extreme opposite end of the space, their perspective, and my attempt to meet it, shapes that occurrence of the performance.

**DU:** How does the durational aspect of the work impact on you as a performer?

**MS:** From the start of the creative process, the prospect of performing over a six-hour period each day naturally influenced my choice of material somewhat! Like the other parameters that make this setting unique, the need to find activities that I could sustain both physically and mentally over that period of time really helped to challenge me to come up with something different from what I’ve done in the past. During the performance itself, the duration also brings a very different atmosphere with it, almost turning the setting into a kind of “open studio” environment that audience members are invited into. I really enjoy the relaxed nature of that setting as well as the immediacy of that connection to my studio practice.

**DU:** Do you consider your work to relate to the others on display in the gallery and at Siobhan Davies Studios?

**MS:** I love the way that Sue [Siobhan] and Victoria’s conception of *The Collection* really encourages links to be made between the different works. For me, it sparks an expansion of the notion of “the choreographic” and how and where it can arise in artistic practice. I think my own work for *The Collection* is perhaps most closely related to Anri Sala’s *Doldrum*, which shares the space with us and punctuates our performances. While Anri’s piece takes an unseen solo performed by Sue and manifests it as sound, I see my work as an attempt to make unheard sound visible as movement. I think of Anri’s work as “hearing dance” while my performance aims toward “seeing music”.