

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Arnaud Beelen

Part 2: On Dance Writing, Improvisation, and Dancing Forever—An Interview with Lisa Kraus

by Charly Santagado

This past winter I met up in Brussels with Lisa Kraus, a co-founder of thINKingDANCE (tD) and former Trisha Brown dancer, while she was taking David Zambrano's four-week Improvisation on Stage workshop at [Tictac Art Centre](#). Part two of an edited interview follows. To read part 1, [click here](#).

Charly: To segue into the workshop at Tictac, who are the improvisations as performance for, including your performance last night at Crude Saturdays?

Lisa: Well to give a little background on why I came to Brussels in the first place, I was drawn to David Zambrano's Improvisation on Stage workshop because I'd seen little YouTube clips of these so-called [Crude Saturday](#) performances, many of which emerged from the workshops. These wide-ranging curated moments showed me that Tictac is a place where people are being egged on to be their most unabashed, brave, creative, and expressive full-bodied selves, and are given some tools to do so in both solos and groups. I thought, "I want to go there. I want to experience that." Regardless of who or what it might be for.

I had a similar feeling when I saw Trisha Brown Company on stage a long time ago. I thought, "I want to be on that stage." And of course just because you have that kind of feeling doesn't mean it will unfold the way you want it to unfold. But it also might.

I might add that Cecily Campbell, the rehearsal director of Trisha Brown Company, had encouraged me to go. And as someone who is over 70, I asked her, "Can I keep up with all those young people?" And she was like, "Oh, definitely. Yes, definitely." That's one key ingredient for dancing forever—surround yourself with people who say yes.

Charly: So did you dance every day at the Tictac workshop?

Lisa: Yeah.

Charly: And how does your body feel?

Lisa: It feels really good. I was sore the first week, but I think I did a pretty good job of modulating my energy. I sweated a lot.

Charly: And how was the group?

Lisa: There were about 30 people and it was an incredibly diverse group. There was a clown from Lebanon who totally charmed the pants off me and probably everybody else. And then a guy from Mexico who had done a lot of whacking, which was a movement language I was unfamiliar with. It was great to be in physical dialogue with such different movers. And David's passionate and colorful exhortations and demonstrations were infectious. There's a sign posted in the dressing area that says something like, "Don't half ass. Always dance with your full ass." And he embodies that all the time.

Charly: Can you say something more about the life arcs that you mentioned earlier?

Lisa: Well dance writing was one, dancing with Trisha was another, and for the past eight years I've been very involved with [Soul Line Dancing](#) in my Germantown neighborhood. I think there's something beautiful about knowing when something's over, but it also does make me think, "Oh my gosh, one day I'll be at the end of my Soul Line Dancing arc too."

Right now I'm also in an arc centered around my own creative practice. I have these dear dancing sisters, Eva Karczag and Vicky Shick, who I've known for over 40 years. Since the pandemic started, we've been meeting together on Zoom every week or two. We share our Tuesday mornings, sometimes dancing in our own spaces and sometimes just having a coffee. At a certain moment when I was going through a really tough time, I danced in front of my screen and after I finished Eva and Vicky said, "Lisa, you should make a solo."

Charly: When was the last time you had performed?

Lisa: 13 years ago.

Charly: Did you work on the solo Eva and Vicky "assigned" you during the workshop?

Lisa: Well before the workshop, I was working on a solo in honor of Steve Paxton who died in February of 2024 and was an important mentor to me. Many years ago, Trisha (who was a great artistic buddy of his) had me learn and perform material from a video of one of Steve's improvisations from 1979. He never remembered his improvisations, and when I performed it he said he didn't recognize it. Later on, Trisha incorporated it into her dance, [Opal Loop](#).

When I was invited to teach at the Trisha Brown Company intensive last June, I decided I really wanted to relearn Steve's movement and present it to the students alongside some of Trisha's choreography from the same era to kind of feel what the differences were. I also decided it would be the seed for my solo, and planned to pair it with Bach piano pieces because Steve had done the *Goldberg Variations* and also worked with the *English Suites*.

I was staying in New York with Cathy Weis who's a video artist and runs WiseAcres and [Sundays on Broadway](#). I discussed the solo with her, and she said, "When I see people working with material from video, I always want to see the original. Wouldn't it be cool to see Steve and you dancing together?" She also told me that the Bach was another solo entirely, which shocked me at first. But she was right, and over the course of two and a half weeks, the solo became a 17-minute trio between me, Steve, and Cathy. I performed it on December 8, 2024.

After that I continued the Bach stream on my own, posting some short improvised clips on Facebook. I did one just before traveling to Brussels and when I get home I'm going to do another. I did work on the project during my time in Brussels, but more passively because the workshop brought up so many ideas worth trying. Both the Bach project and the project with Cathy are still cooking. It's like this whole aspect of my life that's been dormant is reanimating.

Charly: Did you offer any advice to the younger dancers around you at Tictac?

Lisa: Yesterday, when asked to talk about my life in dance, I thought it'd be boring to just go, "Well I did this and then I did this and then I did this." So I called up a random number generator on my phone and set the numbers between four (my age during my first dance memory) and 71. Then I let the numbers tell me which parts of my story I would share when.

I see myself as a missionary for dancing forever and couldn't help but dispense a little bit of old lady advice. I told them to proceed as the way opens (which is actually a Quaker saying). And I talked about little pivotal moments in my life—the beginnings of new arcs where I felt scared and acted anyway.

I also had the opportunity to perform collaboratively with a bunch of the young'uns throughout the workshop. People told me they felt really inspired. Maybe this is another way someone can be a missionary for dancing forever. Just show up in the space with that little ember inside you. Even if it's not manifesting outwardly, it's there. And when you get into the right situation in the right studio with the right people, you blow on it. You give it oxygen. You feed it tinder and it can flare up into a bonfire again.

Charly: Wow, I see why people were so inspired. If you were to choose one thing, what feels the most different for you after being here for a month?

Lisa: I feel more confident in my ability as an improviser.

Charly: Amazing.

Lisa: I feel less hesitant. It feels a little more like just turning on the faucet and having less mental commentary about whether it's good or not—which makes sense. If you improvise every day, at a certain point your brain gets tired of doing the same self-criticism and then you just dance. You just start dancing.

Editor's note: Below is a sample of Lisa Kraus's dance writing at thinkDANCE:

<https://thinkingdance.net/articles/2014/11/20/Thoughts-about-Steve-Paxton-on-viewing-four-of-his-dances-at-DiaBeacon>

<https://thinkingdance.net/articles/2017/07/14/Beauty-and-Genius-In-the-Steps-of-Trisha-Brown>

<https://thinkingdance.net/articles/2017/10/14/Once-we-meet-were-family-An-Asia-Pacific-Dance-Diary>

Article Page Image Description: *Smiling with her left foot stepped forward and right arm lifted, Lisa Kraus angles her weight lightly toward Laure de Dietrich. Kaus's left hand rests on de Dietrich's right arm. Both dancers have their heads inclined slightly to the left. de Dietrich may be descending from a small jump – both of her hands rest on her thighs, fingers spread, palms face-down, knees with a micro bend and feet supinated just off the ground. The duet takes place at Tictac Art Centre.*

Homepage Image Description: *January, 2025. Lisa Kraus dances solo at Tictac Art Centre. Facing stage left, Kraus crosses her left thigh behind her right. Her knees meet. The tops of her left toes press into the ground as her right heel lifts in a demi releve. Kraus releases her sternum to the sky, elbows pulled back, forearms lifted, face tipped toward the ceiling.*

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