



## SEEING THE MUSIC



Chisato Minamimura,  
Independent Dance Artist,  
United Kingdom



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Chisato Minamimura is a deaf dance artist born in Japan and now based in London. She trained at the Laban Centre in London before completing an M.A. at Yokohama National University. She danced with CandoCo Dance Company from 2003-2006, and has been involved in creating and presenting dance performances and workshops in many countries around the world.

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▶▶Here Chisato talks about how she became interested in dance, and her community dance practice. ◀◀

*Before I was 20 I had no interest in dance because I thought it impossible for a deaf person to interpret music. I had a degree in art – I had always been interested in visual art, but that is a two dimensional form. I was invited to participate in an integrated workshop for disabled and non-disabled people. This was the first time this had happened in Japan. I went to the workshop, and it was like doing 3-D art. It was fantastic; it was like communicating without having to verbalise anything at all. I've been dancing ever since.*

*In 1998 I was involved with a Japanese company that offered funding for Deaf and disabled people who wanted to learn or train abroad – I wanted to focus on community dance and so I went to Laban in London and did a course in community dance. I thought how I was taught to teach dance in the community was fantastic. Being deaf I could share with many people through dance.*

*When I meet people for the first time (in a workshop situation) I keep it very simple. I only explain my name and how I communicate. For example I say "hello I'm deaf, there is an interpreter, but please focus on me rather than her." Many (participants) have never met a deaf person before. I just plant those few things with the group – and in the break time people are free to come and talk to me if they choose to. My approach with a group of disabled people is exactly the same. Quite often disabled people have never met a deaf person either. I'm not going to know what their disability is on first sight. I have to modify and change my workshop to match their needs. I make those modifications as I go along.*

*Sometimes in the community workshops that I teach I experience that the disabled people find it easier than the non-disabled people. In addition to dance workshops I also teach communication workshops. When I'm teaching non-disabled people in communication workshops they can feel very closed; they need a lot more time to gain confidence and to be*



*open enough to learn to communicate non-verbally. Once they overcome that barrier their work is beautiful – really beautiful. For example if you put people in pairs and ask them to sit where they are comfortable deaf people tend to sit face to face, but slightly to one side. But hearing people automatically sit side by side. They don't need to have eye contact.*

*Verbal communication is quite detailed. With physical communication you convey emotion and connect with people on a different level. Maybe what I can give to people is the ability to express themselves in an emotional way. I compare it to music – like two musical instruments being able to synchronize or communicate with one another.*

*When I'm teaching I get a lot of ideas and people also have opinions about what I do. For example when I am dancing with a group someone might ask whether I can*

hear the music because it may appear that my movements are following music that is being played. This started me thinking about music. I wondered why people felt that they had to hear music as opposed to seeing it – seeing the rhythm. I started to explore sound and how music can be translated in a visual way by dancers. That in turn influenced my choreography.

I notice that organisations sometimes have very low expectations of me as a deaf practitioner. However, after a workshop is delivered people will come up to me with smiles on their faces, their attitude has changed. Then people understand that we have a right to be in the professional domain. Deaf people can teach too, and importantly they can also choreograph for public performances. What I do is to put on a facade of acceptance when I arrive. I believe that I will transform the attitudes towards me and my ability to choreograph. Sometimes I feel little valued in the choreographic field. However, when I am teaching my choreography gives me validity.

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