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Workshop 'a gale of fresh air'



New York choreographers/dancers Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig give a demonstration of their art at Teschemakers yesterday. Photograph: Toay Ruffell.

By Tess Livingstone

"Where else in the world can you find people so willing to learn and so open to new things," New York choreographer/dancer Sara Pearson said yesterday.

Ms Pearson was talking about the group of South Island dancers who took part in a choreography workshop at Teschemakers last week.

Ms Pearson and partner Patrik Widrig are in New Zealand on the invitation of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council to take workshops on choreography.

The couple come from New York where they have their own dance company.

"I have travelled all over the world, but this group must be the most vital and creative group I have ever worked with," Ms Pearson said.

"Everyone here is hungry for input.

There is a wonderful openness and receptiveness to new ideas."

To teach choreography, Ms Pearson said she encouraged participants "to get in touch with their intuitive selves."

"So many people today choreograph from their minds — they sit back and think. As a result they lose the connection with their bodies," she said.

Included in the week's programme were sessions of meditation led by Canbrians woman Elizabeth Guttridge.

"Meditation gives a deep awareness of what you are doing in the present moment - it increases receptability."

Ms Pearson said she had been amazed at the way the dancers in last week's workshop had picked up on

an idea and participated wholeheartedly in it.

"We have an aerobics instructor, ballerina, leading New Zealand choreographer, teachers and performers, but everyone works together. There is a feeling of equality here that does not exist in New York. There it is more competitive and the lifestyle more stressed."

Ms Pearson said many of the dancers at the workshop had commented on their isolation, the lack of opportunity to get together and share ideas.

Local co-ordinator Bronwyn Judge said the workshop was the first of its kind.

"It is the first time overseas artists of the calibre of Sara and Patrik have been made available to dancers other than the country's top dancers. It has been like a breath, no, a gale, of fresh air," Mrs Judge said.