

Nicole Messner

Erasmus Report from Dance Days Chania, July 2026

Dance Days Chania

From 21 to 26 July, I participated in Dance Days Chania, a contemporary dance festival held in Chania, Crete. During the festival, I took part in Akram Khan Company: *Jungle Book Reimagined* Repertoire, taught by Elpida Skourou; Jacob Gómez: *Tools and Available Body*; and Peter Jasko: *Deep Movement Consciousness*. I also attended the performances *Tidal Wave* by Rosana Ribeiro / SELVA (Austria), *Balkan Ballerinas* by Platform 13 (Romania), and *NEST* by Marie Gyselbrecht / RED SQUID (Belgium/Spain).

The Akram Khan Company: *Jungle Book Reimagined* workshop was led by Elpida Skourou, a dancer with the Akram Khan Company. We spent the first hour warming up and taking a technical class that prepared our bodies for the grounded, animalistic qualities of the repertoire. During the remaining three hours, we learned excerpts from *Jungle Book Reimagined*.

This workshop was a deeply moving experience for me. I was struck by the presence, precision and storytelling behind every movement, but also by the energy Elpida created in the room. Her teaching created an atmosphere of generosity, curiosity and inspiration, allowing everyone to fully commit and go beyond their own limits. Her way of teaching felt both deeply professional and profoundly human, and it left a big imprint on me.

I have never particularly enjoyed repertoire because I sometimes need more time to learn movement material. It is a skill I am still developing. This workshop changed something in me. It reminded me that learning repertoire is not only about memorising choreography but also about understanding intention, energy and presence. It has been my favourite workshop I have attended so far, and I feel grateful and honoured that I had the opportunity to experience this work before the Akram Khan Company closes in spring 2027.

In Jacob Gómez's workshop, *Tools and Available Body*, we explored Jacob's own physical and creative mythology. The workshop consisted mostly of improvisational exercises guided by an imaginative approach. He used his own terminology, such as "the universe" (referring to the hips/pelvis), "Dory and Nemo" (imagining travelling through the spine), "magic bottle", "chicken teriyaki", "Barbie feet", "baby fat", "butter", and "space between the knees", among many others.

It was fun and playful, a process of researching and discovering these different movement qualities through imagination. Jacob also introduced a movement phrase, and we worked in group exercises using the movement qualities we had established earlier in the workshop.

The workshop showed me again how imagination can be a very direct tool for accessing movement and expanding physical possibilities.

Peter Jasko's class felt less like being taught and more like being invited into a shared research process. For me, it was a creative and sensory experience. We began with running, shaking and intuitive dancing before moving into a series of exercises that gradually built on one another. Most of the work was done in pairs, observing each other, participating, sharing presence, finding our own movement qualities, getting inspired, trying things out, and sometimes looking "stupid" in the best way.

The class encouraged us to let go of form and judgement. My favourite exercise was moving without accents. Although it sounds simple, I found it surprisingly difficult and physically demanding, yet at the same time incredibly enjoyable.

What I appreciated most was Peter's way of teaching. Rather than teaching in a conventional sense, he offered impulses and inspiration, researching, exploring and sharing alongside us. It felt very authentic and created a safe space where everyone could be curious, experiment freely and trust the process.

Each workshop offered something different, and I found something profound in every class, every exercise, and every encounter. With each class I take, I find myself becoming more curious. I learned from every teacher and every participant.

I am grateful. For dance, for my body, and for this experience. I leave Dance Days Chania with a full heart.



Performing is a beautiful experience, but teaching is a whole different world. One filled with connection, sharing, growth, and emotion.

Thank you for giving your all throughout these four days. Your passion, energy, and openness made this experience truly unforgettable. I'm deeply grateful to have shared this journey with each of you.

Thank you
@akramkhancompany
@dancedayschania
_festival
❤️

