

Bollywood dancer
Honey Kalaria with Donald
Hutera. © The Times May
2010. Photo: Jas Lehal



Appetite

Donald Hutera sniffs creatively around the notion of being an international glutton for the arts

What single word best defines your thoughts and ideas about creativity? That was the question posed to a bevy of creative types earlier this year by Artis. Founded in 2004, this innovative company has trained over 100 specialists from all branches of the performing arts to go into schools and stimulate learning. Chief executive Rebecca Boyle estimates that her team reaches 35,000 students per week. The benefits rebound onto the facilitators. Each specialist has a mentor, access to a post-graduate qualification and works in partnership with a school or local authority so that the creative curriculum is tailored to a school's priorities.

In March Artis joined forces with the online dictionary Wordia.com in a scheme designed to underscore the importance of creativity in people's lives and in children's language development. To do so they enlisted the help of various movers and shakers in the arts, each of whom agreed to be filmed waxing lyrical about their word of choice. You can view it in the Wordia archives. On March 27 Kenneth Tharp, executive director of The Place, explained the significance of instinct while, fourteen days earlier, the percussionist (and Artis adviser) Dame Evelyn Glennie expounded on what coordination means to her.

To mark the launch of its initiative with Wordia, Artis held a one-off showcase of its work in one of the studios at The Place. A sweet group of little kids from Randal Cremer Primary School in Hackney was ushered into a roomful of adult observers, including yours truly, for a playful sound and movement session led a gently charismatic Artis specialist called Gloop. That's not his real name but a self-chosen moniker; apparently all Artis reps must adopt a catchy new identity when they go out into the field.

It was fun to watch Gloop and his tinier co-stars in action. Now, months later, I still haven't decided what word I'd select that most accurately sums up my associations with creativity. Doubt? Failure? That's no joke. I regard doubt and failure as valuable components of any creative process. It might be easier, however, to consider a self-designated name à la Artis specialists. Boyle's is Buzz. One of the company patrons is cinema bigwig David Puttnam, aka Whirl. I met others from Artis whose name tags sported such alternative handles as Twang, Wham and Kersplat.

I think I'd opt for Glut, as in glutton for the arts. That's often how I feel as a professional audience member exposed to an international array of work, especially in

dance. As a London-based writer I'm never at a loss for vivid, engaging subject matter without even having to step outside of the city. From a community dance perspective two experiences this spring come to mind.

The first was Kontakthof, a three-hour marathon of tenderness, cruelty, desire, despair and pain-laced comedy that the late Pina Bausch originally fashioned for her Tanztheater Wuppertal in 1978. The piece subsequently inspired the German genius to take some incredible risks. She restaged it in 2000 with a non-professional cast of 'Ladies and Gentleman over 65.' Then, eight years later, she remounted the show again but with teen-agers only.

Seen virtually back to back, as I did at the Barbican last April, these two generation-spanning performances shaped up into one of the most indelible, polished and profound community dance events I've ever witnessed. Life-changing, too, especially for the youths and senior citizens (the eldest, I was told, is 82) directly involved. Catching both casts is amazing, claims Bausch's long-time assistant and rehearsal director Josephine Ann Endicott. Why? 'To see what happens to the bodies whenever life eats you away.'

From Teutonic genius to krumping for Christ. The latter was a major motive behind *Our Streets*, choreographed by champion dancer Duwane Taylor and Hakeem Onibudo (artistic director of Impact Dance) for seven male students of Woolwich Polytechnic. The lads, who go by the name Radical, performed in the 7th edition of the annual hip-hop dance-theatre festival Breakin' Convention. They'd only been exposed to krumping as part of a school project with Greenwich Dance Agency. But as channelled through their taut, young bodies on the stage of Sadler's Wells, the violent paroxysms of this aggressive street style seemed to possess a liberating, almost sacred power.

That's rather more than I accomplished while researching a story on Bollywood for The Times of London in May. The pictorial evidence accompanies this column. Yup, that's me, a pale-skinned, stiff-bodied cultural interloper shot while experiencing first-hand the rudiments of one of the world's most hybrid dance forms. What else could a clumsy glutton do but trust the presiding gods and goddesses of kitsch and strike a pose? Creatively, of course.

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