



Jon Beney on a break but still directing! Photo: Andrew Billington

Case study: Big Dance Pledge 2016

Louise White is a dance artist based at The Old Town Hall in Hemel Hempstead and leads Let's Dance, an older people's dance group. Having signed up to this year's Big Dance Pledge, Louise shares with us her approach to using the online resources and developing a version of Akram's choreography that's unique to the group.

Having trained as a dancer in London and previously worked for Darts (Doncaster Community Arts) and with the South Yorkshire Dance Consortium, I relocated to Hemel Hempstead and started work by getting involved with my local theatre. I have been delivering dance workshops for older people for Get Set Go Dacorum – the local Sport England physical activity initiative, alongside working in schools.

Let's Dance meets weekly at The Old Town Hall theatre in Hemel Hempstead, where we dance on stage for an hour and a half. The group are active older people, both men and women ranging from 50-87 years of age.

Being able to begin with Akram's choreography and develop movement with Let's Dance provides an opportunity for us to focus on the creative process of making dance. The dancers experience new movements, creating a dance language that is meaningful and unique to them, expressing themselves and exploring the themes within the context of their own lives. Dancing standing, sitting or kneeling provides a choice, which has no judgment and means that the piece is varied and accessible.

As a dance practitioner it's highly exciting because it's Akram's work, requiring you to stop, think and keep thinking. It means that the process (always the best part for me) is all about creative engagement, a fantastic artistic journey that we are taking together.

Info
toth.dacorum.gov.uk/dance
Louisewhite@talktalk.net

clarity. My teaching experience and my experience in a rugby team definitely came to my advantage, as I knew how to make sure everyone worked together: some of the participants only got to meet on the day of the match itself! The highlight for me was in 2013 when I got to replace Gareth Thomas in the opening of the World Cup final, ending the show by scoring a try. That was a real dream come true, scoring a try at Wembley stadium and hearing my name called by the commentator in front of 75,000 people! This year I've been commissioned to choreograph the half time show for the Rugby League Magic Weekend at St James Park, Newcastle.

Working on the Big Dance Pledge this year draws together lots of that experience, so I'm confident to step in to any situation with the huge breadth of people using Akram Khan's choreography. Learning from Jennifer Irons and Jose Agudo, Rehearsal Directors for the project, we spent a lot of time exploring the material's adaptability. I can see it working effectively for a variety of community and young people's groups. I imagine participants will also love it; it's really beautiful movement to perform.

As Big Dance artists, we know that

we might be called upon to support in a number of ways. It might be to facilitate training with fellow artists and school teachers to work out how best they can use Akram's work. Or it might be about developing it for a specific set of participants, their dance style or for mass performances with loads of groups in a public space. In all cases, I expect this to be a three way collaboration: as practitioners we have Akram's intention to follow, we'll have to respond to the needs and creative ideas of the groups and their leaders, while also offering our own artistic ideas for consideration. It's challenging work but rewarding; when I will get to see the smiles on the faces of the participants, their joy and pleasure to be creating dances and performing together, then I will know my job will have been worth it and I might have just had a positive impact on their lives.

So perhaps this is what Big Dance is about, not necessarily about making dances that are big, but about making big differences through dance.

Info
beney@hotmail.com
twitter.com/jbeney30
+44 (0)7956 424238