

question my practice. This led me to doubt whether there was a role for me in dance or with Kadam. I took six months off and went around the world, performing, visiting dance institutions and meeting new people. My answer unfolded... I missed it so much! Dance is a bond that immediately unites... that enables us as dancers to connect to a different and deeper level of ourselves and the life we live.

Sanjeevini:

Remaining with Kadam, with self-belief and energy, has given a long life and legacy to the amateur project. In 2016, Kadam mounted *The Rose and the Bulbul*, a performance in Stockwood Park which animated the spaces moving from the Islamic to European period gardens, drawing references to refugees leaving their cultures and travelling to the West. In tracing a journey of 20 years from the dance theatre productions of the *Mahabharata* in 1997, to *The Rose and The Bulbul* in 2016, has revealed that sitting at the core are the same key elements of inclusivity – across art forms, across cultures and across the professional/community divide.

The Kadam amateur project undertaken as a job share was unique. The synergy of two individuals with different temperaments working closely created harmony and vision. The energy, creativity and the multifaceted output of the early phase of Kadam's existence established a bank of experience and knowledge from which both the founders have continued to draw. It was key to giving South Asian dance an opening through which it could infiltrate into more mainstream arts.

Info

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Photo: Sheila Burnett; *Stars are Out Tonight*, Amici Dance Theatre Company

Discovery

Wolfgang Stange, Founder, Director and Principal Choreographer, AMICI Dance Theatre Company has for 36 years been unafraid to challenge conventional attitudes to disability and the arts. By drawing on powerful themes, productions are inclusive of disabled and non-disabled artists and performers to reveal the strength, commitment and individuality of each performer. Here we discover the building blocks of his integrated teaching and workshop process

AMICI's work, through my guidance as an artist and choreographer, has always had challenging themes. From the struggle of the working class in *Rueckblick*, to the bereavement and grief of mothers losing their children to untimely death through society's uncaring attitudes, in *Elegy*; from the pain and confusion of a person who is suffering bi-polar syndrome, in *Passage to Sanity?*, to the holocaust theme in *Hilde*. The list goes on.

These performances have a profound impact on audiences as they show the strength and commitment of each performer, respecting their individuality and the acceptance of differences. Clement Crisp of the *Financial Times* reflected:

"The reasons are not difficult to understand. AMICI's artists (for artists they certainly are) are wonderfully committed to what they do, grandly responsive to the demands that Stange makes on them – and his dance theatre stagings are often complex, layered with meaning far beyond the obvious needs for his casts...[company] artists are also blessed with an expressive innocence, with a directness in communication which cuts through all barriers to understanding. In a wonderful way they speak their truth, open their hearts to us, with an honesty devoid of any artifice, with wholly trusting belief in their text, which is unsophisticated and hugely expressive."(1) >>

Community Dance Reflections

Only believe

“Only believe”,(2) wrote Forster. AMICI members believe!

Looking back on the past 40 years and my work in community dance I have often asked myself the question: How is it that in the dance dynamics of the workshop most people open up and are ready to discover their own creativity after a relatively short time in the workshop space? It seems almost too simple, but here is the clue: it is the simplicity that makes it work.

The warm-up

Keep it simple, with no pressure to have experience in the subject. Rather than having elaborate name games, which can be threatening to some first time members, only the name is required and the BSL (British Sign Language) sign of the initial letter of one's name. If the person cannot finger spell, the person standing next to them will support her or him.

The terminology

The basic exercises are also best kept simple. For instance, rather than referring to the head movements of turning the head to the left and then to the right, just say 'turn the head from side to side'. The fear of getting it wrong can lead to a closing rather than opening up. In other words, create a safe environment that encourages rather than discourages.

It is also important that each individual participant feels that he

or she is acknowledged, so making eye contact from time to time with an encouraging smile helps unlock inborn creativity. Education, and in our case creative education, is based on pulling out rather than pushing in. If the participants don't feel they are under scrutiny of how well they do, they are able to free themselves from the shackles of having to do well. They will do well if they are encouraged to let go and are allowed to be themselves. This is at times more difficult for participants without any obvious difference. That's why it is so vital to have a mixed ability workshop, so that participants are able to learn from each other. Each member can contribute in their own way and will learn to value the individual contributions of their fellow participants, no matter how small or big.

Flexibility

This is the most important tool in any workshop or in making work. The teacher, choreographer, artist has to be able to change on the spur of the moment. For example, a student may make an unexpected and valuable contribution that is not part of the teacher's original intention. This contribution then needs to be pursued in order to encourage the student to explore and develop their ideas. It means that the teacher has to be open in order to facilitate creativity in the participants. >>



Photo: Nik Mackey; Wolfgang Stange (right) and Amici Dance Theatre Company in the studio



Time

Another factor to be aware of. Some students need longer to digest the information given and it is advisable to wait. Too often we make the mistake of assuming the student/participant has not understood the task and see their hesitation as not understanding what has been requested. 30 seconds later the response comes and the task has been fulfilled. How frustrating for a student who has understood, but has not been given the time or the opportunity to show their potential.

We often misread our students' level of understanding and determination to be understood. It is not they who do not understand us, but it is we who do not understand them. They may receive the information we try to pass on very differently to how we would perceive it, but not passing new experiences on because we presume it would not be understood is utterly wrong. Most people in their career will have low points, questioning their work. This is natural. We all need acknowledgement that our work has value and that we are needed. Luckily, in AMICI, the raw energy of group members gives me back new energy to carry on the task.

"AMICI affirms life, creativity and the power of compassion"(3). My students have been my teachers on this long road of discovery. Without them I would be nothing. So my advice to all new teachers who would like to open the horizons of their students is to open your own narrow attitudes and try to be honest. Learn from the honesty of your students and make the discovery a two-way street.

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References

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 3. Clement Crisp (2000) Life-enhancing creativity in The Financial Times, 29 July 2000

Biggest challenges, greatest love

Carol Brown, Founder and former Director, TAN Dance, talks about her unexpected journey from audience member to participant to artist practitioner and finally, Artistic Director, and her belief that we all have something special to give

My dance journey has travelled along the same timeline as community dance in Wales. We have grown up together. In the early 1980s, I was enthralled watching a Graham Class at The Cardiff Community Dance Project, (now Rubicon), the first community dance project in Wales. Even though I was in my 30s I knew I had found what I wanted to do with my life. My body struggled, but my passion grew.

I began as a participant, became an artist practitioner, a director of a community dance organisation (TAN Dance), had a spell as Chair of Community Dance Wales, and now, at 71, I'm an independent dance artist.

While I was developing my practice, community dance was evolving from the Animateur movement to organisations employing teams of artist practitioners and administrative staff. To combat isolation, as early pioneers we met informally to support one another, calling ourselves 'Animateurs in Wales'. This grew into Community Dance Wales, a wonderfully progressive organisation

during its lifespan of representing and lobbying for the sector, identifying development needs, formalising standards and offering affordable and relevant training programmes and conferences. Wales is justifiably proud of what has been achieved and continues to be an exemplar of good practice.

With the seismic shift in the 1990s from community dance seen purely as art, to being a tool to deliver social agendas, funding bodies made it clear that continuing support depended on the sector taking on this shift. Dance can do this. Dance can do so many things. Especially when art is at the heart of it. Client groups and demographics changed but the joy of creating art through movement was always the transformative force.

My geographical 'patch' in South West Wales had a city, a town, valleys and rural coastal areas, many of them socially and economically deprived. So the programmes offered varied from major three-year community regeneration projects to the more usual weekly class formats.

But there was something missing! Molière's declaration resonated with me: "There is nothing so necessary for men as dancing".(1) I was only too aware of how few were attending classes, and so I formed Dynion Male Dance Company in 1986, the first of its kind in the UK. It was heartening to see boys' groups springing up in our touring areas. Dynion was truly pioneering and elicited so much interest that the company toured to 11 different countries. Not easy for a 5ft woman to manage such a company. So much testosterone! They were my biggest challenge and also one of my greatest joys.

I always strove for my work to expand the lives of the people involved. I listened to what kind of dance they wanted to do but also sprung ideas on them that they would never have thought of. For example, creating performance work with primary school children to The Rite of Spring and the Headteacher commenting that he had seven-year-olds whistling Stravinsky in the corridors; street dance and percussion for disengaged young people, performing to the works of