

# Sharing flamenco through online spaces



Rosa Cisneros, *Border Tales*, Protein Dance Company.  
Photo: Chris Nash Photography.

Over the lockdown period, Anjali Dance Company, founded by Artistic Director **Nicole Thomson**, swiftly moved their classes online and brought in several dance artists and experts in various genres to offer the company a range of weekly sessions. Among those styles was Flamenco, taught by flamenco dancer and choreographer **Rosa Cisneros** from Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE)

**B**ased in the UK, Anjali Dance Company celebrates the creative abilities and artistic potential of people with learning disabilities, and demonstrates exciting new possibilities in dance. Through its innovative and pioneering work, Anjali engages the professional dance community in a debate about aesthetics, form, purpose and inclusion.

Anjali works with world-class dance artists and choreographers to train talented individuals with learning disabilities, and create and tour original dance work. Anjali's dancers have performed at venues throughout the UK, including the Royal Festival Hall, Sadler's Wells and the Royal Opera House in London with dancers from the Royal Ballet, and at venues in Europe and Mexico. Anjali's performances have been highly praised by critics and reviewers.

We also have a successful youth dance company, Young Anjali, and an Education and Outreach team of dancers with learning disabilities who teach and lead workshops.

Anjali Dance Company enables people with learning disabilities to achieve excellence, provides positive role models and encourages the integration and inclusion of people with learning disabilities in the arts and in society. Artistic Director, Nicole Thomson, says that "our innovative and pioneering work has created a radical new perspective for contemporary dance".

Anjali Dance Company is unique in providing bespoke vocational training in dance for people with learning disabilities. Anjali's dancers receive a continuous programme of intensive, high-quality training, equivalent to conservatoire work at higher education level. The training is provided



Barefoot Flamenco. Photo: Koko Zin Photography.

by professionally-trained dancers, dance teachers and choreographers. It is comparable to vocational training that people without disabilities can obtain through the higher education system. Anjali also offers other groups and organisations integrated education and outreach programmes that develop the teaching skills of people with learning disabilities.

Before the lockdown, Anjali's dancers met three days a week for 42 weeks a year. The main company trains for performances of full-length dance productions, which are created with the help of skilled choreographers and dance artists, qualified technicians, designers and others. The activities undertaken by the dancers include company class, research and development of contemporary dance technique, consolidation of technique and complementary disciplines, ballet (including barre work), introduction to other styles of dance, physical theatre, music appreciation, and strength and fitness training.

The dancers rehearse repertoire pieces and prepare work for performances. They create and work on individual development plans and on their own choreography (solos, duets and larger pieces). They research and develop new material and rehearse new work for premiere and touring. They also have 'get to know you' sessions with guest choreographers and teachers, prepare contributions to education and outreach activity, and have sessions of planning, consultation, discussion and

evaluation of their work.

For the online residency, the dancers learned the tangos compás (rhythm) and explored the zapateo (footwork), the floreo (handwork) and the soniquete (energy). Gestures were also a part of the weekly sessions and we discussed flamenco technique, choreography and how the dancers could use the dance style to explore their own choreographic voice and encourage their personality to shine through. The work over the 2020-21 period saw the dancers develop a sense of pride when dancing flamenco. The Anjali dancers were combining the various elements and also honouring their own bodies and artistic practices. During each class, the company developed their flamenco technique through zapateado (footwork), vueltas (turns), braceo (arms) and developing their 'flamenco ear'. The dancers were also taught a piece of choreography that they performed online together. And lastly, each Anjali company member was given an opportunity to have creative explorations, which were then shared during the session. Overall, we developed a co-creative way of learning and sharing flamenco through online spaces.

#### **Info**

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