



Above: Fearless by Motionhouse Dance Theatre. Photo: Roy Peters



Above: Paul Kaynes.

People Dancing - dance at heart of the West Midlands 2012 cultural programme

Paul Kaynes, West Midlands Creative Programmer, for the Cultural Olympiad in the West Midlands sets out the ambitions for dance in the region

For a change, dance seems to be at the centre of our national cultural life. Television channels, government departments, the health sector more broadly and mobile phone advertisers have all recognised the power of dance - to engage large audiences, encourage people to change their behaviours and to add kudos to brand value.

Dance, in all its forms - from cheerleading to classical ballet - has a unique capacity to inspire and engage people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. In addition, for a nation where 27 million adults are not getting enough exercise and 14 million don't complete even 30 minutes of exercise a week, the added benefits for improving mental and physical health and well-being are obvious. Dance also has an evident link to the Olympic and Paralympic games - because it's fundamentally about moving your body and because it is an artform which can express ideas of interculturality and identity.

So it's not surprising that dance

looks set to become a key part of the culture plans for London 2012. The Cultural Olympiad is a four year programme of activity that will see cultural and creative activity taking place in every corner of the country in the run up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The West Midlands, London and Yorkshire have identified dance or movement as a key focus for their own regional plans- and the level of interest has already sparked talk at a national level of creating a national dance programme for the Cultural Olympiad.

In the West Midlands, we already have a strong infrastructure for dance performance and participation, but it is patchy. The launch in 2008 of the International Dance Festival Birmingham, cemented our regional reputation as a centre of dance activity and dance participation levels seem to be on the increase. So much so that when the West Midlands were looking to identify areas of activity that would form the core of its regional cultural programme for London 2012, it chose

dance. Not only would dance allow us to build on an existing regional strength but also it had the ability to bridge the gap between sport and culture that is so central to the ethos behind the London 2012 Games.

The result is, People Dancing, a programme of activity aimed at getting people across the West Midlands moving for themselves. People Dancing is founded on the principle of encouraging mass participation in dance activity and we want to inspire people of all ages, skills and abilities to make dance part of their everyday lives. Our aim is to enable different types of activities which will engage the widest spread of people across the region. The five areas we are looking to make an impact on are:

- Dance at grass roots level: supporting collaborative programmes from dance companies, leaders, sports clubs or community groups to develop dance at grass roots level and encourage people to take up dance >

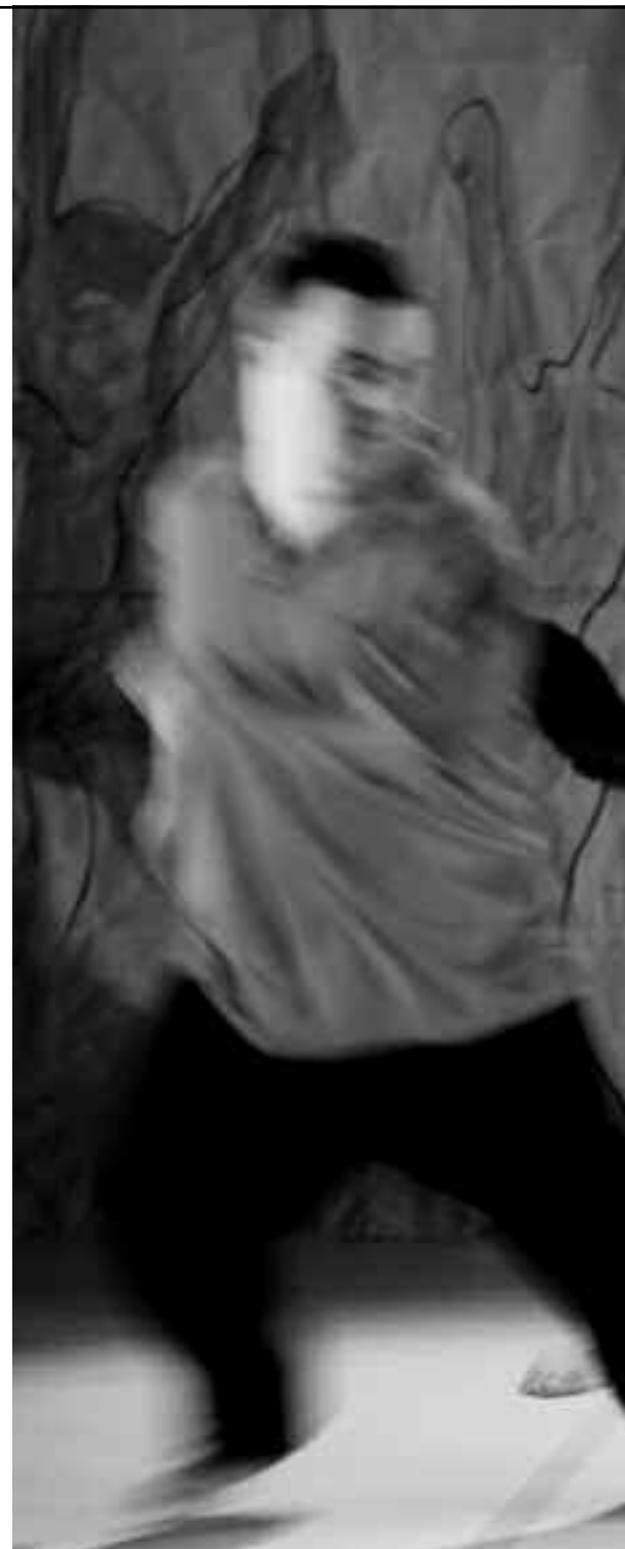
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- and dance related activity locally
- Flexible dance stage: enabling mass participation in dance using a portable dance stage which will 'tour' the region in the summer months and enable community dance events to take place
- Dance leadership initiatives: developing the capacity and skills of dance leaders in the region and encouraging leaders of dance to work with new and existing partners in fresh ways to build capacity. Training dance leaders and other professionals who could play a role in encouraging dance as a means physical and mental well-being
- Site specific dance: projects where dance takes place in unusual and unexpected places. Large scale, mass participation dance events in unexpected places
- Marketing and creating a digital record: ensuring that the public is better informed about opportunities for them to dance in the West Midlands and providing an online space for information about all aspects of dance.

From street dancing to line-dancing, the main objective of the programme is to encourage more people to take up dance and movement activity as part of their everyday lives. We will do this by working with schools, sports



Above: Cultural Olympiad, West Midlands 2008 launch. Guzelian photography, printed courtesy of Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.



groups, professional, amateur and community-led dance organisations, as well as other key partners to ensure wider engagement across communities. Working with Primary Care Trusts to train and enable dance leaders to offer dance as part of their exercise referral schemes, or working with charities to offer dance and movement as part of end of life care for children, families, the physically frail, the elderly and people in hospices, are just two examples. Another focus will be on encouraging young women who typically 'fall out' of physical and sporting activity after



Above: Trace project Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company. www.blueeyedance.com Photo: Mark Follows.

leaving school, to adopt more active lifestyles through dance. People Dancing will also develop specific initiatives to target young people, work with people with disabilities, and communities in rural/isolated areas with few community resources.

People Dancing is now looking for innovative ideas for developing grassroots dance projects, dance leadership development and site specific dance activity. Organisations based in the West Midlands and delivering dance activity for the benefit of people in the region who wish to be part of the programme can bid for

between £30,000 and £100,000 for non-commercial projects over the next three and a half years. Proposals for programmes under People Dancing this year need to be made by 8 May 2009. There will be subsequent commissioning rounds in November 2009 and twice each year in 2010 and 2011. Anyone interested should contact peopledancing@artscouncil.org.uk for further information and to book a one-to-one surgery to discuss ideas.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games have the ability to inspire people to engage in sport and cultural activity.

Ultimately our objective through People Dancing is to harness that unique inspirational quality and build on the legacy of the Games to encourage people to take up dance. The end result - we hope - is a region that sees dance as an integral part of its everyday life and where everyone understands the power of dance to make them happier and healthier.

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