



Above: Sarah Cobley.

The people and the place - a joined-up approach to the Cultural Olympiad

Sarah Cobley, Partnership Director at Dance South West describes how becoming involved from the start has begun to reap rewards for dance across the region

The South West will be hosting the sailing events for the London 2012 Olympics in Weymouth & Portland against the stunning backdrop of our World Heritage coast, so the Cultural Olympiad holds exciting possibilities for us. Dance South West has been involved in the planning process from the outset, at regional and local county level.

As well as engaging with the regional strategy, each county in the region is producing its own plan for the Cultural Olympiad. This will create many new opportunities at a local level for dance companies and practitioners. Dance South West joins up ten partner dance agencies in an active regional network, sharing information and planning together, so it's relatively easy for us to get to grips with large-scale, cross-regional initiatives. We have been fortunate enough to have received support towards capacity building from Arts Council England South West so that we could engage with the Cultural Olympiad from the start. This has given us time to explore the opportunities, start to build the partnerships and disseminate information throughout the region.

When the Cultural Olympiad became part of my portfolio of work, my first point of call was our London 2012 Creative Programmer, Richard Crowe, one of 13 such Programmers across the country. The Creative Programmers are the regional representatives of the London 2012 Culture team and will lead on bringing the Cultural Olympiad to life in each region and nation.

Creative Programmers are the first point of contact for people outside London, giving information and advice on how to join in with the Cultural Olympiad. They are working alongside cultural agencies, producers and individuals and brokering partnerships.

Over the past few months I have been actively exploring where the potential partnerships and opportunities are, to get behind the organising principals, the structures for delivery and to embed dance at the planning stages. I have found a number of key initiatives in the South West and have positioned Dance South West as a regional partner.

Quest is the proposed main project for the Cultural Olympiad in the South West, being led by our Creative Programmer. It will create a series of physical, virtual and performance journeys that will connect the region, moving towards the 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games in Weymouth and then beyond. Quest will operate across the sectors and disciplines of culture, sport, science and education, representing a series of unique and powerful partnerships. Quest will be brought to life through an inspirational narrative-driven outdoor performance journey - a connected series of events and shows that take place in various locations on a specific geographical route across the region. This core performance journey will be made by a high quality, diverse and multi-skilled company of all ages that will include non-disabled and disabled practitioners and will represent the visual arts, dance, music, circus,



Above: Plymouth and Devon Youth Dance Companies, with Chance to Dance Group in Pulse FX. Photo: Caroline Littler.

theatre, science, sport and education. Dance South West is a member of the Quest Stakeholders Advisory Group, which brings together partners across cultural, sporting, social and environmental sectors in the region. The Group will ensure that the interests of the various sectors are properly reflected in the development of the region wide programme of activity, and will be able to give advice on appropriate local contacts.

In each sub region, a local steering group will be set up under the leadership of unitary or county cultural managers and key cultural agencies, which will bring together local representatives from across the sectors. While there is no regional pot of money to deliver the Quest programme it is envisaged that the sub regional steering groups will secure funds locally to enable sub regional activity.

The Legacy Trust has allocated funds to each region and country of the UK to develop and support innovative and exciting projects in communities embracing the values of the 2012 Games. In the South West, our legacy project is RELAYS (Regional Educational Legacy in Arts and Youth Sports) which will inspire and engage young people in the South West and their diverse communities to participate, produce and promote cultural work and sporting activity. It will take their learning forward and generate a positive legacy beyond the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games through the establishment of new sustainable festivals and events, an enhanced distinctive regional cultural tourism

offer and the development of knowledge and skills.

The Jurassic Coast is the only natural World Heritage Site (WHS) in England and, it is believed, the only natural WHS in the world with a dedicated arts strategy. The Jurassic Coast Arts Strategy aims to take forward the outstanding artistic legacy by supporting and co-ordinating the creation of contemporary arts work which together adds to the enjoyment and understanding of this fantastic natural resource. The programme has been planned to develop over time. This will enable it to both genuinely engage with local communities and also respond flexibly to the growing interest and involvement of arts and other organisations in the area. Through helping to identify shared goals, encouraging cooperation unusual partnerships, and a strong sense of working together, the programme will seek to support the Olympic legacy vision for 2012 and beyond.

The Big Screens and Live sites, a network of giant outdoors screens located in 17 cities across the UK, offer huge performance and screening opportunities. To celebrate the launch of the Cultural Olympiad, Dance South West commissioned choreographer Louise Katerega to create Pulse FX, an intergenerational dance bringing together young and older dancers who performed in three locations across the South West, including the Live site in Plymouth both in front of and broadcast live onto the Big Screen. This was possible through a partnership with the >



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BBC's Screen Producer.

Inside Out was a signature event celebrating the Cultural Olympiad launch. An estimated 10,000 people attended the spectacular Veles e Vents, (meaning 'wind and sails') by Valencian-based outdoor performance company Xarxa event in Weymouth, overlooking the London 2012 sailing course and over 300 people participated in education workshops and residencies across the county. It followed the huge success of Inside Out 2007, which featured extraordinary events in extraordinary places throughout Dorset – attracting record audiences of 30,000 to the largest free festival of outdoor performance in the South West. The event was managed by Activate Performing Arts, one of Dance South West's partner dance agencies based in Dorset, on behalf of the Dorset Theatre Promoters Consortium and programmers in Bournemouth and Poole. Plans are developing for the next Inside Out festival in 2010 for people all over Dorset to have the opportunity to

experience more extraordinary events in extraordinary locations.

In addition to the regional opportunities we are building partnerships to position the region to engage with the National Projects such as Artists Taking the Lead (UK Arts Councils), Film Nation (Film UK), Somewhere To... (Legacy Trust), Discover Places (English Heritage and Natural England) and Unlimited (LOCOG).

There has been some negative publicity around the Cultural Olympiad with recent press articles publishing that "robust discussions" are taking place over the direction of the Cultural Olympiad, with disagreements about such things as legal agreements, the use of images and logos, rather than strategic or artistic differences. I think it is important to remember that no previous host city has even embarked on Cultural Olympiad of this scale before and I think Sir Christopher Frayling, former Chair of Arts Council England, was correct in claiming in a recent speech that there are too many 'front doors' and there is a need for 'single creative intelligence leading the project'.

I see my role at Dance South West to be working in partnership with national and regional cultural organisations, to develop those clear pathways and a 'one door approach' for dance artists and companies in the South West to create projects under the Cultural Olympiad vision and values.

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