



Left: Gwyn L Williams.
Photo: Alison Davies.

Flying the flag for Wales

Dance plays a significant role in the Cultural Olympiad in Wales, says **Gwyn L Williams**, Creative Programmer for London 2012 in Wales

Dance is, inevitably, an integral part of the developing programme of the Cultural Olympiad in Wales. Why inevitable? Because dancing, like singing, is an integral part of the human DNA. Much of the great music that has been produced across the centuries has its roots in both singing and dancing. Richard Wagner, for example, described Beethoven's Seventh Symphony as the 'apotheosis of the dance.'

Young people in Wales dance more readily than they sing in many cases, and there are projects developing across the country that incorporate strong elements of movement. Many organisations are signing up their projects for the Cultural Olympiad's Inspire mark, a branch of the 2012 programme that recognises the most notable Olympics-inspired ideas and initiatives. This is the first time in the history of the Games that Olympic branding has been made available to non-commercial projects. Through Inspire mark communities all over the UK can become part of the Olympic family in the run-up to 2012. The Wales Millennium Centre's urban arts project Criw Cymru (www.breakinconvention.com/bc-hub-cardiff) remains the first in Wales to be inspired by London 2012, and it's also the first in the Welsh language. This is an exhilarating new hip hop project run by the Centre in partnership with Galeri in Caernarfon, Theatr Brycheiniog in Brecon and the Arts Centre in Aberystwyth. Young people all over Wales gathered across the summer in Cardiff to form a hip hop college that afforded them the opportunity to work with great theatre artists and refine their skills. A week-long residential course was led by choreographer Kwesi Johnson, who described it as 'an intensive week of activity with the chance to work with the best tutors in rapping, graffiti and hip hop dance, as well as top athletes who can give a different take on artistic development.' The inclusion

of sportsmen and women in the project cements the relationship between dance and the Games. Criw Cymru will run every summer until 2012 and will reapply for the Inspire mark annually.

At the opposite end of Wales, in Llangollen, the International Musical Eisteddfod (www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk) has been running since 1947. Dance was introduced into its programme the following year. Since then during every festival the focus on Wednesday afternoons has been on traditional dance groups from all over the world. At the beginning of July this year the Eisteddfod featured a dance and music project for disabled young people. All the World, One Smile was awarded the Inspire mark for a project demonstrating the willingness of the Eisteddfod to embrace the core values of the Paralympic Games - courage, determination, inspiration, equality.

At a recent meeting of the community dance sector chaired by Siri Wigdel, senior dance officer for the Arts Council of Wales, I spoke to representatives about the opportunities that are available in the Cultural Olympiad. Several dance projects are beginning to engage, including from North East Wales Dance. Based in Denbighshire, this agency is researching a project that will twin Wales with East London. It's one of the many developing ideas that, like Criw Cymru, connects Wales to London for the 2012 Games.

The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) has divided the UK into twelve sections - 'the home nations' of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, plus nine English regions. Each has an executive committee for matters to do with the Olympic Games. In Wales this group is also developing the projects funded by the Legacy Trust UK as part of the plans for the



Above Top: Harloch Castle, Cauldrons and Furnaces Legacy Trust project. Photo courtesy of Ben and Jood.

Above: Criw Cymru, the 1st Cultural Olympiad Inspire mark project. Photo courtesy of Wales Millenium Centre.

"There are plans to twin a bus stop in East London with a bus stop in Carmarthen, and who is to say that dance will not form a major part of this project?"



Above left: *Hwyl yr Haf* event - with over 4000 primary school children in St Fagans, 2009. Photo: Urdd Gobaith Cymru. **Above right:** Cauldrons and Furnaces Legacy Trust project. Photo: Erin Maddocks.

Cultural Olympiad. This project, called Power of the Flame, is in four distinct parts that are being developed largely in partnerships with local authorities and other organisations.

In the Rhondda, Valleys Kids is working up a theatre piece with the Langa Township of South Africa (www.valleyskids.org). Operation Zulu includes several opportunities for exchanges with South Africa and merges the natural singing voices of South Wales with the natural dancing traditions of black South Africans. Each community will learn from the other and, in 2012, Operation Zulu will be performed in Capetown and in the Rhondda.

Disability Arts Cymru (www.dacymru.com) is committed to working with individuals and organisations to celebrate the diversity of disabled and deaf people's arts and culture, and to foster equality across all art forms in Wales. As part of Power of the Flame, DAC is developing a project for disabled young people that encompasses dance, theatre, music and literature. Taking the ancient tale of Prometheus as a starting point, young disabled people are posing the question: whose flame is it anyway? as a catalyst for creativity.

One of the themes of the Cultural Olympiad is animating public spaces. Cauldrons and Furnaces is a project developing in eight imposing sites around Wales. CADW (www.cadw.wales.gov.uk) is the keeper of the historic environment in Wales. The name is a Welsh word which means 'to keep'. With Cauldrons and Furnaces CADW aims to fulfill one of its primary missions, which is to encourage community engagement in the heritage of Wales. Eight inspirational locations are key to this project: the magnificent castles of Harlech, Caernarfon, Denbigh, Flint, Caerphilly and Laugharne, the Ironworks of Blaenafon and St David's Bishop's Palace.

At the beginning of July a launch project was realised whereby Theatr Harlech (www.theatrharch.com) brought children from six secondary schools, two primary schools,

the regional Urdd associations (the Urdd is the largest cultural and sporting youth organisation in Europe), the theatre's own junior company, the Workers' Educational Association and a host of artists into the castle to workshop and present a modern interpretation of the mythic Welsh tales of the Mabinogion. Dance formed a substantial part of the production as the cast of over three hundred young people used all of the available floor space of the castle, built by Edward 1st, to tell the four branches of this tale. Independent Ballet Wales (www.welshballet.co.uk) led several workshop sessions with the young people involved in the performance. The director, Darius James, and education officer Amy Doughty brought eight dancers with them to choreograph huge spectacles within the castle walls.

It seems inconceivable that the Cultural Olympiad can exist without dance. That is certainly the message these projects in Wales are communicating. As the journey towards the 2012 Games continues, more and more of the communities in Wales will begin dancing as an expression of their projects. There are plans to twin a bus stop in East London with a bus stop in Carmarthen, and who is to say that dance will not form a major part of this project? A Communities First music and dance project in the old slate mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog in Snowdonia has ambitions to form an alliance with the young musicians and dancers of the Lea Valley, and CARAD (www.carad.org.uk) in Rhayader, Powys is teaming up with Kinetica in the Brady Arts Centre, East London for an ambitious project which aspires to dance twelve enormous puppets from all over the UK, including along the Old Drovers Road in Mid-Wales, to the Olympic Park in the run-up to the Games in 2012.

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