

Donald Hutera doing a mask dance.  
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# Who's that masked man?

Face concealed and scissors in hand, **Donald Hutera** takes to the streets of Islington

**I'm a magnet for newspapers, whether it's the ubiquitous freebies available in most big cities or copies of the publications I write for.** I don't just read and trash them. Instead I clip articles and pictures that might amuse or be relevant to friends and family. There's no dearth of available material for an American mate with an avid interest in the royal family. My daughter gets sent critiques of soul singers and the occasional beauty tip, while anything to do with canines is earmarked for a dog-owning couple.

I keep the most striking images or reports related to dance, much of it global and frequently political. Recently I spotted a shot of three Aboriginal women performing a sacred dance to mark the 25th anniversary of the Australian government handing Uhuru – the sandstone monolith formerly known as Ayers Rock – back to the country's indigenous people. Around the same time Barack Obama was surrounded by schoolboys in Mumbai, mouth open and hand raised as if he were about to start orating rather than self-consciously submit to a folk-stepping photo opp. One of my favourite clippings concerns a rural Chinese pig born without hind legs. The accompanying article quoted the counter-revolutionary slogan from Animal Farm: 'Four legs good, two legs better!' Clever, but what I loved was simply seeing eight-stone Zhu Jianqiang (translation: strong-willed pig) balancing as gracefully as a ballerina on her front trotters.

For me the clippings are extra evidence that dance is all around us whether in print, on the telly or net or, perhaps most immediately, on the street. It was the latter that took the fancy of Gary Winters and Gregg Whelan of the British performance company Lone Twin. Working with the choreographer Anna Williams, and in partnership with the organisations home live art, Sadler's Wells, Dance 4 and DanceEast, the lads cooked up 'a bespoke participatory dance project' called Street Dance. In 2009 this peripatetic piece went public in an inner city suburb of Nottingham. A year later the location was a Suffolk village. I caught up with it on a cool, sleepy Sunday afternoon in mid-September when it was staged on a few primarily residential roads in the London borough of Islington.

Wherever the project happened there were no auditions, but rather a self-selection process whereby anyone interested could join in. In each setting the prep time was three weeks from the initial getting-to-know-you session to first performance. Individual or households were each

accorded four one-to-one sessions lasting approximately 75 minutes, usually followed by two group rehearsals of the entire event.

Street Dance was an appealing collective self-portrait of an area, rather like a collage of kinetic snapshots transforming street into stage and bringing dance to where real people live. It was a reminder, too, that everybody has stories to tell and movement is a great means of conveying them. The Islington version had a Pied Piper feel, picking up spectators en route. We 'met' each participant in turn as they embarked on a short series of tailor-made phrases in outdoor sites ranging from cul de sac to churchyard playground. The eight-strong cast included a semi-retired grandmother, a young woman recently returned from living abroad and uncertain where she belongs (hence her position in the very middle of a road) and a gay couple celebrating the third anniversary of their floral shop with a romantic tango. As one of the performers later put it, 'The thing I liked most about the project was the way in which it made you think that, yes, life is a kind of dance. Where is the line between my everyday movements and my dancing self?'

In mid-October my dancing self attended a festival cum cultural conference in Korea (South, I hasten to add). There was nothing at all everyday about the movement I witnessed in an outdoor mask dance staged in Hahoe, a UNESCO-preserved village in the south of the country. Accompanied by live and mainly percussive music, this extended mid-section of a longer satirical opus featured aristocrats and servants, butchers and half-wits, flirtatious maidens and salacious monks. All roles were embodied by masked men – masters of the art, or masters in the making – who moved with a grounded grace that clearly communicated to a massive, all-ages audience. The masks themselves – beautiful, grotesque, comic – revealed rather than hid the spirit of each character. What a privilege, too, to afterwards be given a brief workshop in mask dance (hence the accompanying photo) by one of the nation's living cultural assets. Suddenly as I type I'm wondering who'd tear out this column and maybe send it to someone they know. Unlikely. After all, I'm neither president nor pig but just a bloke bent on scouring the streets for dance.

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