



Land of poets, singers and... Big Dance Cymru

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Big Dance Cymru 2012



Clockwise from top left: National Dance Company Wales/RAD Boys Only Weekend at the Dance House in Cardiff. Photo: Roy Campbell-Moore; Mass participatory project touring Wales, Big Dance Week. The Readers, David Rolland Chorégraphies. Photo: Coralie Bougier; Jên Angharad in action! Disability Arts Cymru: Skills Week 2011. Photo: Brian Tarr; Margot Catlin as a young woman. Margot is now in her late 70's and will be dancing in Llandudno with Cai Tomos during the Big Dance Week. Project: AdainAvion, curated by Marc Rees. Photo: unknown

Bringing Big Dance 2012 to Wales has not been straightforward.

In April 2011, the two national dance organisations that had represented Wales on the UK dance task force, Dance Takes the Lead (1) were withdrawn from the Arts Council of Wales' revenue client portfolio for strategic reasons.

Consequently, Community Dance Wales, the umbrella body for community dance in Wales, entered a transition period, to determine whether it could continue as a national organisation.

Although we recognised that it would not be easy, the decision was made that it would continue, given that the value placed on its services was high. So, in October 2011, the one remaining post was frozen until further funding could be sourced.

In order to achieve a successful funding outcome for Big Dance Cymru 2012, securing a robust working partnership was critical and time at a premium. The commitment of Canolfan Mileniwm Cymru / Wales Millennium Centre as a partner, was secured and midway through March we received the welcome news that our Arts Council of Wales funding application was successful – Big Dance 2012 is coming to Wales!

With one (defrosted!) post and now trading as Dance Cymru, we will be in part-time residence at the Wales Millennium Centre and from April through to December, it's all systems go for the Big Dance Hub in Wales!

To say that the delivery of this programme within such a short timeframe will be challenging is an understatement. A tremendous amount of energy, drive and clear, strategic thinking is needed to make Big Dance Cymru 2012, as big and bold as we can. I believe that this partnership will prove to be a strong and dynamic one.

Big Dance 2012 promises to be the biggest UK dance celebration ever, aiming to involve five million people across the UK. It is a very exciting prospect, knowing that Wales will be part of it.

In addition to hopefully engaging at least 60% of schools across Wales in the Big Dance Schools Pledge, we have plans to tour a mass participatory dance performance during Big Dance Week, from the North to the South of Wales, culminating in a Big Street Dance celebration in the capital. For the Big Dance Trail we want to celebrate as much, if not all of the dance activity and events happening in Wales leading up to, during and following Big Dance Week in July 2012. With the Big Dance 2012 marketing campaign, we can promote dance in Wales to the world, as never before.

The Welsh National Anthem boasts a land of singers and poets... 'Gwlad beirdd a chantorion...' it mentions nothing of dancers, which isn't to say that in the 19th century, the Welsh were a people who preferred non-emotive posturing!

In 1856, when the National Anthem was written by Evan James and his son James James of Pontypridd (2) Wales was a culture of stoic Chapel-goers. Sadly, Chapel forbade

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Above: Mass participatory project touring Wales, Big Dance Week. David Rolland, Valeria Giuga, Fani Sarantari and Cyril Accorsi (all centre), The Readers, David Rolland Chorégraphies. Photo: Julie Teyssou. Below: Friday Dancing, community class for adults with learning disabilities. Photo: Powys Dance

dancing, believing it to be sinful (3). Consequently, the identity of Wales as a people of dancers was not to be and dancing went underground. Maybe this was at the heart of a successful mining industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (...now there's a thought!).

Fortunately, in today's Wales, dance can be enjoyed in the open. Many of us recently witnessed a theatrical spectacle as our national rugby team 'danced' their way to victory in the Six Nations Championship. We experienced a proud people, spirits high, dancing triumphantly in the stadium, streets and pubs across the country. During a time of austerity, surely this is a good thing. Imagine then, what it will be like to experience our nation dancing, not only as a result of winning, but to dance because whoever, wherever and at

whatever time we choose, we are dancing... to dance!

The impact of such an ambitious aspiration is yet to be realised, but maybe... just maybe, it will enliven the hearts of many, igniting an enthusiasm and passion for dancing that will last long into the future.

Who knows, it may even touch the hearts of those who determine political, cultural agendas, enough to recognise how dance can make a significant difference to the lives of the people they serve.

The year 2012 will take its place in history as a year the Olympics came to London. How fantastic it will be if people in Wales look back on 2012 and say... "Remember 2012... the year we danced!"

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(1) The partnership was set up to ensure that dance established and maintained a position high on the Cultural Olympiad agenda and has driven the ambition of a UK wide Big Dance 2012

(2) Davies, J, A History of Wales, Penguin Books, 2007

(3) Cymdeithas Genedlaethol Dawns Werin Cymru / The Welsh Folk Dance Society

<http://dawnsio.com/en/dances/welsh-folk-dance-history/>

