



Lord of the Flies. Photo: Helen Maybanks

# Lord of the Flies

**James Mackenzie-Blackman**, Executive Director, Re:Bourne, on their exciting dance production of William Golding's classic novel so far performed by over 100 boys and young men from across the UK alongside professional dancers

**I am writing this 25,000 feet above the UK flying from Inverness to Birmingham.** Last night we had our forth 'premiere' of Lord of the Flies at Eden Court in the Scottish Highlands and now I'm flying back South to visit London for our already over-subscribed taster workshops for our project at Sadler's Wells. 2014 will undoubtedly be remembered as a year of life and career changing moments, an incredible amount of travelling and emotional highs and tired lows.

This project in fact started life in 2010 when the then Scottish Arts Council and the Theatre Royal in Glasgow approached our company with the challenge of creating a large scale piece of work with professional and non-professional talent. Matthew Bourne quickly came to the well-known novel, Lord of the Flies, as it seemed perfectly matched to this creative challenge. We knew boys and young men needed to be encouraged to dance and this all-male story, set on a desert island

seemed ripe for dance adaptation with the potential for interesting, rough and masculine choreography. We approached the William Golding Estate and now hold the exclusive rights to present Lord of the Flies through dance.

The project in Scotland achieved more than we ever hoped it could. Working with 16 boys from across the West Dunbartonshire area of Glasgow we knew in the tech' week we were changing lives forever. What was planned to be a one-off project was becoming something more significant for both us as a production company and all the young people and parents that were integral partners.

In 2012 when I joined New Adventures and Re:Bourne I felt determined to find a way to remount Lord of the Flies. I wanted to share the project with more venues and more young people, opening up opportunities to work in communities who have little or no-access to dance. I set about

touring the country to meet with venues to share our ambition for the project and to clearly communicate that we were looking for project partners and not just not touring houses who would simply receive the production 'off the back of the lorry'. I thought we could make the production possible with approximately six venues and here we are two years later touring the show to 13 cities across the length and breadth of the UK.

The project has been principally funded by Arts Council England with additional resources, support and guidance from the Arts Council of Wales, Creative Scotland and Marks & Spencer (we need a lot of school uniform in this show).

After provisionally booking a thirteen venue tour we set about reflecting on how we would go about mounting a project of this size to ensure deeply routed community intervention to reach communities untouched by dance. We quickly realised that to achieve this we >



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would need to call on local expertise. We also knew that we wanted to have learning throughout every layer of the project and so decided to appoint a national team of emerging community dance artists to find and recruit a diverse group of young people. These artists would become our 'Lord of the Flies Ambassadors' and they would become the most critical part of this huge project.

In the spring of 2013 we started the process of recruiting our ambassadors. We toured the country with our tour directors to interview and observe workshops. We were blown-away by the dedication of the artists we met many in the early stages of attempting to establish a career as a freelance artist.

After the initial recruitment period we started planning for our first Lord of the Flies Boot Camp. We knew we needed to teach repertoire, share our values for the project and network the ambassadors together in the hope they would provide each other with peer-to-peer support during the life of the project.

Our initial Boot Camp in September 2013 brought together a remarkable team of emerging artists passionate about developing talent in their region. Over the course of the week we immersed them in the production; our hopes and dreams for it and tried to give them as many skills, tricks and techniques as we could. We sent them

back to their regions with high hopes and high expectations.

Fast forward to now to the late spring of 2014. 108 boys and young men have appeared on stage alongside our professional dancers. Over 6,000 have participated in the wider outreach programme smashing our ambition to reach that many over the course of the entire year (we have eight venues left to go). We have reached into communities who have never experienced dance before and we have supported, mentored and encouraged artists, young people and audiences to trust us. I do appreciate that we have the strength of a well-known brand behind us, it's an utter privilege working for New Adventures but despite this existing 'step up' I have been personally impressed by audiences willingness to accept this piece of work.

I have many hopes and ambitions for Lord of the Flies but when pushed I try to simplify it all into three outcomes. Firstly to make a commercially viable piece of work for the large-scale that brings together professional and non-professional talent. Secondly for the work to be artistically outstanding and thirdly for the project to change young people's lives through dance. It's still too early to say as to whether we will achieve all of these ambitions but the early indications are looking encouraging.

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## Working in

Leading dance classes with vulnerable people in confidential settings such as refuges or criminal justice settings brings its own imposed limitations that can be challenging when trying to create a healthy learning space. Here, we've asked one experienced dance practitioner who works in these settings to share the signposts that she has found useful

### **My community dance practice uses long digested personal and professional experience to support participants in confidential settings.**

What drove me to work in this context was intuitively knowing that dance could be useful as part of a varied toolbox that nurtures reflection, self-belief and confidence in one's capacity to move beyond present circumstances.

Before you choose to work in confidential settings take the time to reflect upon why you believe this to be the right pathway for you. If upon reflection, this is still for you then make doubly sure you are a determined and resourceful person. It takes gentle and firm persistence to access settings, and then negotiate so you can deliver your offer. Next, accept that you will be working with partners who, usually, have little or no knowledge of dance beyond those images in the public realm and limited personal experience. As dancers we know about bodies, energy and space, we also know the added value and unique selling point of including some kind of dance practice when seeking nurtured positive-