

# Wolf Pack called into light

Executive Producer **Belinda McElhinney** hunts down a couple of members of Barrowland Ballet's intergenerational company, Wolf Pack

**Barrowland Ballet is one of Scotland's most successful contemporary dance companies.** Based in Glasgow, it is built around the artistic work of choreographer Natasha Gilmore. Our dance theatre performances for children and adults tour nationally and internationally. Alongside the company's professional work we have a focus on producing participatory performance projects; for us the two are interdependent with one inspiring the other. We work with the same creative team on both our professional and community projects. In August 2016 we launched Wolf Pack, our free intergenerational company in Glasgow for participants aged 7 to 90-years-old. The company meets weekly and devises pieces with Natasha to be performed at various venues and festivals. They have also just made a short film, Wolf Pack, that premiered in December.

Davey Anderson, a participant says: "We're backstage at Tramway, waiting to go on. A big gang of us. Primary school kids, teenagers, young adults, parents and seniors. All together. Warming up, stretching our limbs, getting focused. The atmosphere is electric. Everyone is buzzing. Then we get called to the stage and we stand impossibly still in the wings, holding our collective breath in the darkness until the music begins, calling the wolf pack out into the light.

"When I first took my daughter Rosa along to Barrowland Ballet's Intergenerational company workshops

on a Tuesday night, I thought it might be a fun, active thing to do together. I didn't realise how transformative it would be for us both. Rosa can be a little anxious in new social settings. I'm also quite shy. Neither of us were used to expressing ourselves through contemporary dance. We might have felt awkward, vulnerable and exposed. But right from the beginning the atmosphere was warm, encouraging and supportive. Then, as time went on, we began to feel like we have a valuable contribution to make to the process, as authors of our own choreographic material and members of an ensemble that's bigger than the sum of its parts.

"It has been wonderful for me to spend time with Rosa, not in our usual roles as parent and child but as dance partners and creative collaborators. It has also been a privilege to be part of the amazing community that has emerged from the 'intergen' company. We are a very diverse group of people in terms of age and life experience but we feel a strong sense of collective identity. Rosa has made some lasting new friendships and I've widened my social circle too. Taking part has made us more confident, taught us new skills, rekindled a love of dance for me and sparked a new passion in Rosa.

"It's enlivening to be in the room with Natasha and the fantastic dancers of Barrowland Ballet. It never feels like there's a divide between the professional dancers and the community participants, or between the adults and the young people. There





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“I think Barrowland Ballet has done something very special in creating this safe space for us all to come together and play, which is so rare and precious. The People Dancing conference was a brilliant opportunity for us to share that energy with a bigger group of fellow travellers from around the world.

“We feel very proud of what we achieved. Sharing the work with an international audience at Tramway, our favourite performance venue in Glasgow, was a dream.”

Irene Kelso, another Wolf Pack participant adds: “First of all I need to say that dancing with Barrowland Ballet’s Intergenerational company is always a joy and a privilege. There is something very special about being part of this vibrant, supportive group and I want to say how much I appreciate it. Strangely enough I was much more nervous about this performance than I was when we danced the whole Wolves show at Tramway, in March. I found it difficult to hear exactly where my spin came in my duet. The spin was a visual cue for other dancers and in my mind I probably made it more important than it really was and so made it even more difficult. There was much less pressure during the rest of the performance because I was just a part of the big picture. Like a moving cog in a wheel – running, walking, circling, reversing, watching, always focused, all moving together, all dependent on one another. That is the joy of dancing with this group.”

Above right: Davey Anderson and his daughter Rosa.

Left: Jennifer Bruce, Mairi Campbell and Irene Kelso from left to right.

All photos: Brian Hartley.

#### Info

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