

# Insert Title Here

Artistic Director, **Gemma Coldicott**, reflects on SLiDE's (South London Inclusive Dance Experience) seminal intergenerational performance piece and highlights ways of working towards relaxed performances and inviting an audience to 'be themselves'

*Togetherness ebbed and flowed,  
we built and fell and thought together,  
We added in and to,  
Moved into the space and onto  
each other,  
We fought back to the origin, keeping  
an 'intention' to honour the past and  
pave a future.*

**As the company took their bow and the audience's applause reverberated around the performance space, a beautiful church in Crystal Palace, we were certainly paving a future.** This was, after all, a 'step up' for SLiDE into a new territory of bigger ambitions, a chance to show our potential and signal a new era in our development. The work was professional and bold, the audience were given the responsibility of naming the work; they titled it, 'Held: The ways we can be together'. Clearly the work had communicated its essence; collectives of diverse groups of people making meaning from being/moving together. In the studio we had been together throughout and this 'togetherness' was tangible, it permeated the performance, space and drew the audience towards us. "That was a beautiful performance. The work was mesmerising, romantic, peaceful, affirming and joyous", commented Ray Oudkerk, Assistant Principal, the Brit School.

Insert Title Here, the working title for the project, began with dipping into SLiDE's past and exploring our 'greatest hits' of movement tasks and games. Of

the fourteen people in the studio, eight were current SLiDE dancers, seven of whom have a learning disability. Three professional dancers, disabled and non-disabled, and a cellist, all new to SLiDE, completed the performers, who ranged in age from 18-62. Initially, the musician moved with us, which led to one audience member asking where we found a dancer who could play the cello. I wore a multitude of hats throughout the project including choreographer, producer, and project manager.

Independent dance artist, Louise Katerega, joined us as Dramaturg to ask pertinent questions and document the process, holding the creative decisions accountable to the emerging work. The early days in the studio created an embodied and lived understanding of SLiDE's values: accessibility, collaboration, creativity, quality and play. I am proud to say that these have been developed over several years of community dance practice, alongside SLiDE co-founder Anita Wadsworth. A practice encompassing a broad range of projects, from dance for people with Parkinson's to youth dance, elders groups and inclusive social folk dances (ceilidhs).

During the project we developed new rehearsal rituals. After lunch, we practised a Japanese fishing folk dance (Haiya bushi), taught to us by dancer Takeshi Matsumoto. Each morning, at home, I wrote a poem about the previous day in the studio, a new >

Sorrel De Paula Hanika, Takeshi Matsumoto,  
Vicky Malin, Sarah Butcher (cellist)  
and dancers, Insert Title Here.  
Photo: Vipul Sangoi (top left and right);  
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Sorrel De Paula Hanika, Takeshi Matsumoto, Vicky Malin, Sarah Butcher (cellist) and dancers, Insert Title Here. Photos: (c) Peter G Ball [www.petergball.com](http://www.petergball.com)

reflective tool I developed. I shared the poems with the company and some were used to generate movement material. I discovered that poetry enabled me to explore and articulate the more challenging emotions I was experiencing from the project. These poems resulted in a change to the dynamics and tone in the middle section of the piece, in contrast to its overall temperate nature. Four poems joined the soundtrack, punctuating the classical musical score composed and performed live by the cellist. The poems also offered pauses in the movement and a further access

point for the audience.

Insert Title Here celebrated diversity, which included a multi-cultural cast and leadership team and involved a diverse approach to sharing our work with the community. We conducted workshops with elders at the Croydon African and Caribbean Family Association; Apsara Arts, a local Indian Dance Company; and a Turkish women's' group – all new partnerships for SLiDE. We shared with these groups several movement tasks so they could experience structured improvisation and the folk dance. Without exception the highlight for all three groups was the folk dance as it spoke to their existing language of dance and cultural fabric. The fishing theme to the dance enabled the Caribbean elders to reminisce about fishing in their youth. The narrative in the folk dance was familiar territory for the Indian Dancers and this section of the workshop had the most participants. The folk dance brought about an exchange with the Turkish women's group who taught us one of their cultural dances.

Unfortunately, despite a good connection made through the workshops and the offer of free tickets, these locally based groups did not attend the final performances. A stark reminder of the difficulties in generating an audience for inclusive contemporary dance.

*Individual's emerged – standing tall, breaking through, forgetting, remembering, There became a less-knowing togetherness, Someone stepped through the not-knowing, minds and bodies together again, Into a knowing togetherness.*

To enable the SLiDE values and the fundamental themes of the project to be present throughout its conception and completion, the performances also had to be relaxed and Louise led on researching and championing this concept. This included key information sent to the audience in advance, signage and an introduction to relaxed performance with the audience being invited to be themselves throughout.

Despite the two performance spaces being steeped in tradition and having overtones of formality, both

the Braithwaite Hall (Croydon) and St. John the Evangelist church (Crystal Palace) lent themselves well to relaxed performances. We seated the audience in the round with beautiful natural light accompanying our afternoon performances. This enabled us to celebrate the spaces we inhabited and in the church we were able to extend pauses and silence, offering further contemplation and reflection.

“The inclusive atmosphere and welcoming tone for the performance was skillfully set up by the directors so that everyone felt permission to be present and involved.” Sophie Eustace, Executive Director, Fevered Sleep.

At the beginning and throughout the rehearsal phase the concept of a relaxed performance was fully embedded. We nurtured the group through giving equal agency and time to each performer, supporting them to develop individually with solo material. Through this nurturing we were able to empower each performer to feel confident to be seen and perform in a very natural and stripped-back setting.

We handled this carefully to ensure that the audience was also comfortable with this intimacy. “It was clear that the performers were totally immersed in presenting the work, with a level of authentic engagement often bereft in established dance companies.” Michelle Groves, Director of Education, Royal Academy of Dance.

We celebrate our performers and their differences in ability or experience. Any individual weaknesses become group strengths. “I like dancing with SLiDE, I have fun and feel listened to. We make a dance together here and that's different. I prefer that. I'd be sad if I couldn't dance anymore”, Jack, SLiDE dancer.

*Things broke - ideas repaired them - not knowing became something familiar and in the familiar we found a common thread. Somehow in the risk, trust formed quickly. No one quite knew how we got there but a knowing togetherness emerged.*

### Info

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