

When deciding on a theme for Let's Dance International Frontiers (LDIF) 2022, it did not take long before we settled on the concept of In Situ:

Responding to Space, Place, People and Time. The idea is very much rooted in the immediacy of the current landscape. Over the last two years, restrictions have shifted performance online and dancers have had to seek out non-traditional performance spaces whilst studios and theatres have been closed. But how often do we consider the environments in which we dance? There is so much more to unpack when considering what it means to respond to the histories encapsulated in different places, what it means to unlock the embodied histories within ourselves, what it means to be Black dancing in traditional white spaces, and what it means to create safe spaces to dance.

For LDIF, we have always sought out non-traditional performance spaces for site-specific work. For example, in 2019, we hosted a performance in Leicester Cathedral by Ayikodans, a Haitian company; we created a dialogue that began to dispel some of the misconceptions around Voudun and illuminate the shared connections between West African religious traditions and Catholicism.

This year we are presenting a new commission to launch the festival, Siren Calls: to an Illusive Journey. Composed by Philip Herbert in honour of the Windrush Generation, it will be interpreted by two different choreographers: Monique Jonas and Thomas Talawa Prestø, in two different spaces. Monique's interpretation will be presented in the Victoria Gallery at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, and on a recent visit to the site, she spent time taking in the different paintings on the walls. For example, there is one painting that references Uncle Tom's Cabin and several others that were painted before the abolition of slavery. Whether directly or indirectly considered, there is always an opportunity to analyse the history and reality of how a space has come to be.

It is also important to consider how our bodies are a home for dance. Thomas Talawa Prestø's Talawa Technique addresses how histories and stories are carried within our bodies by bringing together

Making space to dance

How often do we consider the environments in which we dance? What histories are embodied within the space and bodies we inhabit? Ahead of the return of Let's Dance International Frontiers, **Pawlet Brookes** MBE, CEO and Artistic Director of Serendipity, unpacks what it means to make space to dance and what this means for practitioners from the African and African Caribbean Diaspora





Ballet Hispánico's Dandara Veiga in Tiburones. Photo: Paula Lobo.

“We have always sought to establish spaces where under-represented voices are amplified and where all are welcome to listen and learn.”

movement from across the African and African Caribbean Diaspora with contemporary styles. The techniques that we have an opportunity to learn can change the way in which we move: whether you have access to moving your spine in a certain way or sit in your hips in a certain way, even how you walk across a room. This is why it is integral that we create spaces that open up the dialogue for dance techniques beyond euro-centric dance styles and teach techniques from across the African and African Caribbean Diaspora that address how dance is located within the body.

Even where dance performance is taking place within traditional theatre spaces, we have an opportunity to challenge the conventions of those spaces through performance, in the dialogue that the artists and audience have. For the first time in 2022, we will be taking over the main theatre stage at Curve with Ballet Hispánico, a company whose ethos is underpinned by creating a space for cultural dialogue and immersive arts centred in the Latinx Diaspora.

We have always sought to establish spaces where under-represented voices are amplified and where all are welcome to listen and learn. The significant advancement and use of digital technologies in dance has opened doors for greater accessibility, whether it is breaking down geographical barriers, providing more resources that have audio description, British Sign Language and captioning, or opening doors to how people are introduced to dance but also within safe spaces for connection. Through social media, people have found community and a voice for both dance and addressing socio-political issues. Now is the time to address how we continue to develop these spaces, how we connect the dance ecology nationally and internationally, to look at issues of access and fundamentally to create outstanding pieces of work that have something to say.

During LDIF, we will launch the Black Digital Dance Revolution, connecting dance organisations in four cities (Leicester, Leeds, London and Newcastle) with artists to innovate both locally and internationally.

In Leicester, we have already started to unpack >>

Below left to right: Ballet Hispánico in Tiburones. Photo: Paula Lobo; Tabanka. Photo: Rob Sloetry Covell; Ballet Hispánico in Tiburones. Photo: Paula Lobo.



what it means to inhabit public spaces through dance with a short dance film entitled Let's Dance in the City. A few weeks ago, we filmed three dancers, Tia-Monique Uzor, Jessica Walker and Helder Delago, improvising in different spaces from the Clock Tower to the Methodist Church. Often, when we consider online dance, we think only of the end result on a screen, but even in the creation of the work there was an audience of people going about their day who took five minutes to observe, appreciate and engage with dance.

Through LDIF and the Black Digital Dance Revolution, and amidst our core work as Serendipity Institute for Black Arts and Heritage, we are working to connect the dots and create a holistic picture that supports artists throughout their careers and centres perspectives from the African and African Caribbean Diaspora, embedded as part of cultural experiences for all. Whether it is on a traditional stage, the streets in carnival or in your front room, dance is the foundation of a collective experience. We are creating space to dance.

Info

LDIF 2022 runs 29 April – 8 May 2022. The theme In Situ: Responding to Space, Place, People and Time is also the title for this year's conference, taking place on 3 May at Curve in Leicester. For more information visit, www.serendipity-uk.com or call +44(0)116 482 1394.



