

LPM Dance create global connections

George Adams and **Helen Gould**, Artistic Directors of La Petite Mort Dance Theatre (LPM) share how the growth of their practice led to an international collaboration re-visiting the approach of 20th Century Mexican-American dance pioneer Jose Limon as source material for inclusive dance now.

Setting the scene

It's a 'pea-soup' kind of day and we're looking out over the beautiful Morecambe Bay. We can just make out Blackpool Tower in the hazy distance.

We're LPM Dance, a Lancashire based artist-led organisation who believe dance has an integral role in society to make a difference.

On the schedule for Monday, has been our morning online Pilates class, delivered from George's living room and zoomed into homes locally in Lancashire to as far away as Sweden. It's a freelancer's life!

A bit about us...

We ambitiously set up as La Petite Mort Theatre in 2011, quickly realising that two dancers running an organisation had a lot to learn. With a love of

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Julie Spence, Indepen-dance. Photo: Brian Hartley.

LPM. Photo: Brian Hartley.



Neil Price, Indepen-dance. Photo: Brian Hartley.



Neil Price and Julie Spence, Indepen-dance. Photo: Brian Hartley.

dance, passion for teaching, and a great working relationship we've sustained ourselves for over 10 years.

We met working for Ludus Dance making issue-based work for predominantly young audiences. By contrast, La Petite Mort, at the beginning, focused on adult audiences, pushing in a different direction exploring unconventional spaces, experimental choreography, blending dance style and artforms. We have collaborated with opera singers, musicians, designers, and many others...including Lush Gorilla perfumes. Shows were edgy, provocative pieces of dance theatre. It was fun. It was Marmite (1). And it pushed us artistically.

Today the work has evolved. It continues to take risks in a broader contemporary context. We're inspired by blurring the spaces between performance and participation; we're interested in bringing high quality entertainment and community practice together whilst continuing to research the benefits that dance has on health and society.

Local and international people inspire our practice

From the early days, we have striven to make connections to different people, cultures and countries to enrich our ideas and support the work we create for local communities. From

Yemeni young men in Manchester learning their traditional dances through to George leading on one of Europe's first inclusive international touring companies Intégrance.

At home, we went on to involve disabled and non-disabled emerging artists in our professional research and performance. We began supporting people in their ambitions to be dance artists and dance leaders of the future.

We engaged in our own professional development – dance movement psychotherapy and yoga therapy (George), Dance Education & Science and Dalcroze Eurhythmics (Helen). This heightened our understanding of the value of dance in health, care and science. As a result, we developed an inclusive symposium, IF, which celebrated the interaction between, inclusive dance education, performance and healthcare. These strands continue to inform our projects to this day.

Connecting communities over the pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic, it was touch and go for the continuance of the company. We all remember the struggle of the muted microphones and unflattering camera angles! Together with our participants we made it work. Alongside weekly Parkinson's classes, Pilates, early years, yoga



Above left: LPM, Preston group. Photo: Jonathan Bean. Above right: George Adams, LPM. Photo: Brian Hartley.

and ballet classes we programmed community workshops with international artists - all funded through a community crowdfunder.

Then, in July 2021, over the period when everyone was being pinged by the NHS app, we took the plunge and produced two live festivals to launch a Lancashire Dance and Health Hub programme.

It was bananas! There were risk assessments as long as your arm (double sided and in small font), constant rescheduling, reworking and reconsidering... BUT it happened. And, wow, was it worth it. Bringing communities together to celebrate live performance and participate in dance during a period of isolation was life affirming.

From the festivals, we developed our local Dance and Health Hubs to support those who were socially isolated. We simultaneously worked hard to remain connected to the global community at a time of political and social discord.

More than ever, we feel it is important to come together as a global community. Dance can create a shared feeling of empathy and quickly form relationships within a space, whether that be virtual or physical. In a world of labels and divisions, we believe dance can connect and create a sense of union with each other.

A Global Groove Project: a new collaboration

We identified The Four Nations International Fund as an opportunity to connect different artists that we'd worked with through the breadth of our work. We were delighted to receive their support.

Our Global Groove Project facilitated disabled and non-disabled professional dancers from Europe to explore Limón technique with dancers from the Limón Company in New York.

Our project/research/research and development/collaboration (authors asked to insert name) facilitated disabled and non-disabled professional dancers from Europe to explore Limón technique

within the context of inclusive practice with dancers from the Limón Company in New York.

The Limón Company has just celebrated their 75th anniversary and is one of the pivotal modern dance company's and training centres in the world. The (Doris) Humphrey/Limón Technique is based on breath and the body's relationship to gravity. Repertory is based on shared human experiences of hope, loss, community and isolation. These principles are inclusive and relevant for us all.

We travelled from Lancashire to Glasgow to meet up with Julie Spence and Neil Price from 'Independence', Scotland's award-winning dance organisation for disabled and non-disabled performers. We then connected virtually with former Scottish Ballet principal dancer, Eve Mutso in Estonia and Limón company dancers, Joey Columbus, Savannah Spratt and Lauren Twomley in New York.

We worked together for two days in Glasgow exploring fall and recovery, weight, opposition, succession and expression. It was enriching and progressive. It reminded us of the importance of coming together after a period of social isolation and reignited an excitement for discovery.

Another reason we were interested in this research was to look at how transferable these principles were to other settings. Our local dancers have enjoyed exploring these ideas in new ways. Their response informs how the practice develops and evolves. This has been especially relevant for our classes for people living with Parkinson's, where finding efficient movement pathways, flow and weight is especially valuable.

The inclusivity of professional dance training and choreography is also important to us. We have mentored disabled and non-disabled dancers and choreographers throughout the last ten years. Global Groove continues to inform this work and it's exciting to think where this may go next.

The project led to us developing a workshop

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Left: Dance Fusion, Fleetwood. Photo: Jonathan Bean. Right: Helen Gould, LPM. Photo: Jonathan Bean.

which was showcased at Gathered Together, Scotland's international inclusive dance festival in the summer. We have also been in conversation with Dante Puleio, Limón Company's artistic director regarding development of a future project. He reflects on our collaboration:

"The work of Limón continues to transcend time and the technique transcends barriers, obstacles, and imaginary boundaries. It disrupts antiquated ideas of what it is to be a 'dancer' and can inform any and every performing artist or person interested in using their body to express themselves. It is thrilling to see how this approach to artistic development inspires and changes lives around the world generation after generation."

LPM's ambition is to further this collaboration, by including more international artists, creating a dance film and developing an associated inclusive teaching resource. Watch this space!

References

1. Used in this context, Marmite, is an expression often used in Britain indicating extremes of love or hate which comes from public responses to the strong taste of a branded yeast extract spread.

Info

In this phase, Global Grooves was not part of the Limón's programme of work but supported-in-kind by the Company. Dante Puleio initiated the connections to the dancers who we contracted independently. He is in conversation with us about Phase 2 of the project and offered his quote for this article.

www.lpmdance.com

www.limon.nyc

www.indepen-dance.org.uk

The dancers involved fed back

"I was introduced to Limón technique on my first job as a dancer at Loop Dance company in Chatham, The Artistic Director Nina Atkinson brought teachers over from the US and Mexico. Dancers from our side of the pond like Becky Brown left the company to lead Limón education in New York. Funnily enough, Limón has seemed to follow me ever since and, in recent years, we have developed a relationship with the most recent Artistic Director Dante Puleio. I seem to come back to the principles of Humphrey/Limón when I seek support and inspiration through dance."

George Adams, Co-Artistic Director LPM Dance

It's a toolbox of principles that we can all use to investigate dance further and think about movement in a new way.

Joseph Columbus (USA)

I felt it was very inclusive and very nurturing. It really helped my mobility as well.

Julie Spence (Scotland)

I can now use the Limon practice to help my own needs and development. Hopefully, to choreograph my own work, use my imagination and attend more classes like this. *Neil Price (Scotland)*

It was such a pleasure to return to playing with these ideas and allowing all movement to be exploration. *Savannah Spratt (USA)*

I was just so blown away from the kindness of these universal principles. The breath starts it and it develops the movement. I think this 2 days have given my body back 10 years. I'm like new born! *Eve Mutso (Estonia)*

There are all of these universal experiences that we all go through. How it individually manifests within all of us is very different. Everybody breathes, but my individual sensation would be different from [yours]. We have that shared experience of breathing to live that connects everybody.

Lauren Twomley (USA)