

40 Years on, shaping up for the future



Chris Stenton,
Chief Executive of
People Dancing sets
the scene for our
40th Anniversary.

It is a pleasure and honour to introduce this edition of *Animated*, in our 40th Anniversary year. We are thrilled to bring you an incredible line up of writers, spanning all kinds of contexts and practices. Some offer a historical perspective that traces back to the beginning of community dance as we know it, others are future-focused. All are about driving change.

People Dancing and its former incarnations (which for the history geeks in the room are: Foundation for Community Dance 1995-2014; Community Dance and Mime Foundation 1989-1995; National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs 1986-1989) is but a youngster against the true elders. Some of the early organisations celebrate their 50th Anniversary this year or last, including Cheshire Dance, Rubicon, Swindon Dance and Ludus Dance. We are greatly indebted to them, and to the too-numerous-to-name individuals for their vision for a different way of being in and through dance.

For our 30th anniversary in 2016 – at a joyous evening of reconnection and dancing hosted at Cecil



Above: Roots and Routes.

Sharpe House, London by English Folk Dance and Song Society – we celebrated by awarding 30 Honorary Life Memberships (1) to individuals whose contribution to community dance has been exceptional. We also published a special edition of *Animated*, featuring some of the original pioneers of community dance, and their invaluable reminder of context and heritage that you can read here (2).

When writing the introduction to that edition the big news story of the day was the outcome of the 2016 USA election. Ten years on and the legacy of that moment in time continues to dominate – headlines, yes – but more importantly the day-to-day lives, sense of security and safety of many millions of people. Such is the prevalent wielding of power at this point in the 21st century. We hope for brighter futures, but as someone once said to me ‘Chris, hope isn’t a strategy’. I think they’re right about that, so we need hope, and presence, and a plan.

Back in our own world, and as a generally optimistic glass-half-full kind of a person, it does feel like we’re



Top left photo: Rachel Cherry. Middle and bottom left: People Dancing Summer Intensive. Photo: Andrew Moore. Right: Corali - Learning to Give and Take the Lead. Photo: Mark Anderson.

having to dig ever-deeper. But that's the job, and between us we do the job well. Actually, we – and by we, I really mean you – do the job brilliantly: a collective effort for the collective good. I hope (that word again!) that we never lose that defining feature of community and participatory dance.

By community, I mean the processes of dialogue and inclusion through which people collaborate and exchange ideas and by participatory, I mean people participating in art-making – alongside skilled dancers, teaching artists and community practitioners – making meaning about themselves and the world around them.

Incredible things can happen when people, their aspirations, their rights and choices are at the centre of providing opportunities to be creative and artistic, and when, crucially, we also strive to identify and help overcome the barriers to participation that all kinds of people face.

Who wouldn't be on board with this? And how can we work together to release a flow of resources to match our ambitions and deeply held knowledge of the power

of dance and dancing for people and communities?

According to the internet, middle-age is roughly 40-65, a time when perhaps you know yourself better – maybe you don't worry so much about what others think – and have some hindsight as well as some insight. My sense is that this applies to organisations and networks too. What better time, then, to shape – and, perhaps, shake – things up for the next ten years. We intend this to be our legacy from this anniversary year, and so strategy is where our attention will be for the coming months.

Let's plot our own path to 2036, as a serious profession mindful of the challenges as well as the opportunities, with fun and joy along the way and, to borrow from Brendan Keaney's article, still keeping the faith.

References

1. www.communitydance.org.uk/about-us-2/who-we-are
2. www.communitydance.org.uk/DB/animated-editions/autumn-winter-2016-17