

BARROW EDITION

Men & Girls Dance



Men & Girls Dance celebrates the rights of adults and children to be together, play together and dance together. The show is performed by five professional male dancers and nine girls from Barrow, who over the last two weeks have been working together to make this new version of the show.

Dr Daniel Tyler-McTighe, Creative Director, BarrowFull

Men & Girls Dance in Barrow-in-Furness

BARROWFULL is Arts Council England’s Creative People and Places organisation in Barrow-in-Furness and we’re here to increase the amount of excellent arts and culture available locally as well as ensuring that community-led decision-making is central to what we do.

Part of our job is to bring brilliant artists and companies and high-quality creative experiences from across the UK and world to Barrow. Fevered Sleep, based in London, are the latest in the long list of collaborators ‘from away’ who we’ve introduced to Barrovians over the last three and a half years. It’s a list that’s included musicians, dancers, and visual artists from Kolkata; creative practitioners in diverse fields from Coventry, Preston, London, Manchester, Liverpool, and more; and theatre companies from Sweden, Spain, Greece, and even Leeds!

So now, as we continue to introduce ambitious, radical and new things to Barrow, we welcome to Barrow Fevered Sleep and *Men & Girls Dance!*

Everything BarrowFull does is in partnership with others, so we’re grateful as ever to our friends at the Forum and Westmorland and Furness Council for the support for this project; the local primary schools whose heads and staff have seen the exciting potential of this production and have hosted workshops and encouraged

***Men & Girls Dance* simultaneously empowers and relies on the participation, creativity and energy of nine local girls**

their students to participate in the production; Anti Racist Cumbria for their advice and support; Royal Central School of Speech and Drama for funding the production in Barrow; and last – but by no means least – of all, our host organisation Women’s Community Matters who have been key partners in the collaboration with Fevered Sleep and consultants on addressing the themes and issues such a piece can prompt. Special thanks here should go to Women’s Community Matters’ Senior Officer and Love Barrow Awards 2024 winner, Rebecca Robson MBE, for her advice, enthusiasm and support.

So why *Men & Girls Dance*, why here, why now?

In everything we’ve seen about past versions of *Men & Girls Dance* in other places one thing always rings out from audience and participant responses, and that is joy. Yes, the arts have the power and responsibility to challenge, provoke and question, but they also have a very important task – in our ever-challenged world – and that is to bring joy, happiness and inspiration.

A main draw for BarrowFull was the fact that *Men & Girls Dance* simultaneously empowers and relies on the participation, creativity and energy of nine local girls, who have not had this type or level of experience before. To see them – young members of the Barrow community, supported by their families and carers – making artistic work with an internationally renowned company is really exciting and gets to the heart of our mission to co-create exceptional arts and cultural activity with the people of Barrow working in partnerships with local, national and international examples of excellent, socially engaged creative practice.

In programming discussions with community groups, our advisors and BarrowFull consortium partners, several themes for exploration came up which covered challenges faced by young people today: generational interactions; a sense of community between those who aren’t family; and men’s issues among others. This project was therefore considered a valuable addition to the wide-ranging programme of work BarrowFull supports in Barrow. We know that Barrow has seen and still sees the global, local and online challenges of the sexualisation and exploitation of girls, and therefore the idea of young girls and adult men spending time together, dancing together, could provoke concern or tension. In answer to this, the focus of those of us in the town working to host Fevered Sleep’s production has been ‘what does good look like?’ when exploring how adults and children, importantly specifically men and girls, can be in the same space, interact and enjoy each other’s company. We believe this production – in both the rehearsal process and in public performance offers up a significant and rich answer to that question. Simply put, *this* is what good can look like.

Sam Butler and David Harradine, directors of *Men & Girls Dance*

Editorial

All adults should feel the potential to have normal, positive relationships with children. *Men & Girls Dance* hopes to offer provocations about, and ultimately solutions to, what we feel has fast become a problem around the culture of adults, and especially male adults, just being with children today. Fuelled by a media hungry for horror, most exchanges between adults and children are subject to checks and policies leading to a state of suspicion and anxiety about being in the presence of children, for whatever reason. We understand the need to keep our children safe and we know, of course, there will always be adults who want to do harm. But both men and children are crying out to be allowed to engage with each other in normal ways, both physically and emotionally. As witnesses to the incredible relationships built up between the men and the girls we have worked with so far on this project, we know this is both true and important. This newspaper – which brings together contributions from many different people – is a direct response to an almost overwhelming desire of those who have seen the show to talk about the themes it brings up.

BEGINNINGS

This is how it began. We were auditioning male dancers for one of our shows, and we found ourselves in a room with a group of extraordinary men, improvising and dancing together. The day before, we’d seen an end of term ballet recital – mainly performed by girls – and we had the idea to place these very different dancing bodies side by side, to see what would happen if we did. As adult artists – a man and a woman – who had made many projects in collaboration with children, this didn’t strike us as a particularly provocative idea. So we were surprised to find that many of the people we spoke to about it reacted negatively, finding it a bit too challenging, a bit too creepy, a bit too weird, a bit too risky, a bit too inappropriate. These unexpected reactions opened up an ongoing conversation about the possibility of bringing men and girls together. A conversation about whether or not it’s right for adults and children to dance together. Whether or not it’s possible to create a public space which gives permission for play, tenderness, trust, empathy and love. The performance we’ve made – and this newspaper – allows the conversation to continue, with you.

CELEBRATION

Men & Girls Dance is a celebration of the ways in which people can be together, of how we might exist, of how we can live around and with each other. It’s an exploration of closeness and of relationships, and of our perceptions of what it means for men and girls to come together in this way at this time. We refuse to accept that men and girls have no place together, and we celebrate the rights of people to come together to play, to empathise, to hold, to carry, to listen, to look, to be tender, to protect, to dance, and to love. *Men & Girls Dance* is a dance of bodies that are political bodies, that dance for love.

RELATIONSHIPS

Men & Girls Dance, the show, brings together five men who dance professionally with nine girls who don’t. In just two weeks these performers will make and rehearse a show together, leading to public performances at The Forum. The show is partly choreographed, and partly improvised. So, like life, it’s full of things we know already, and full of things we don’t. By bringing these nine ‘ordinary’ girls and these five professional dancers together to make a show, we as directors – along with the audience – witness real relationships develop as they learn about each other. As they figure out how to play together, how to dance together and how to be together – with trust, empathy and care – perhaps they suggest how we all could live.

Maddy Costa

It starts in silence. A body, stepping with social convention, bound by the roles prescribed to it.

A body searching for another way of being.

Longing to fall out of line.

And then the music begins.

The body curves, folds, pulses to this rhythm.

Its limbs lift and shift, lighter somehow.

Muscle and blood, bone and skin, crackling with electricity.

I want to have a conversation about that body, the dancing body. About dance as a safe space in which bodies can transform themselves: no longer gendered, no longer labelled, unrestricted, unbound. In which the body can transcend its surroundings, trace new relationships to the elements, to the air. I want to have a conversation about how dance might shape other ways of being; ways of being human, together and apart. Lifting the weight of history, shifting the burden of expectation. Pulsing new rhythms. Shattering the lines.

I feel like *Men & Girls Dance* might be a place where those conversations can start.

Muscle and blood, bone and skin

Words from the show

I can see her freckles

I can see the hairband around her wrist

I can feel the knuckles in the back of her hand

I can see the mark on her right arm, on her elbow

I can hear her breathe

I can see her flaring her nostrils

I can see the wobbly tooth in her mouth

I can hear her heart beat

I can feel the warmth of her skin against my face

I can hear her shoulder creak when she breathes in

I can see the red in her hair

I can see you watching me

I can see the freckle just above her mouth

I can see the way she's playing with her fingers

I can feel the holding of her breath

I can see that she is looking at me

I can see

I can feel



Love

We sit together. Face to face. Close up. I can feel the heat from her face. I can feel her breath on my face. She scrunches up her nose, crosses her eyes, trying to provoke a reaction. I push my face closer, cross my eyes, try to make her laugh. Her weight on me. Her small arms wrapped round my neck, our closeness. This – what is this? – friendship? We laugh. I tickle her. She pokes me. We get into some strange stuff, playing together, talking in a made-up language, gobbledygook, our own world, a little bit lost in one another. We make things. We break things apart. We make a cake. We go to the park. We run a little bit. I lift her up. Too big, but it's a way for me to tell her how much I love her, just by lifting her up like this. We muck about. Trying to make one another laugh. "I love you" "I love you too" "Do you want some cake?" She's standing on my feet. We go for a walk.

We dance.

She wriggles, and squirms, but it feels as though she's trying to get into me, not away from me.

I like to remember how her weight has changed. How hard it is to hold her and lift her now, even though she still wants to be lifted, and to be held. I like to remember how tiny she used to be, small bundle of flesh, easy to carry, and now how much she's changed.

Ruth Little

I like her smell, of her hair, the particular smell of her breath, and the temperature of her. When I imagine how she feels I imagine she is quite cool, and solid, although I think in reality she is probably quite hot and quite slight.



My father lifts me
from a nightmare in the flailing dark.
Carries me half-blind into the garden
where five tall poplars stand.
The stillness opens its hands
to the rhythm of his breathing.
And as he rocks me in his arms
he names the bright motes
in the southern sky:
Aldebaran and Achernar,
Antares and Canopus,
Regulus and Sirius. And with a finger
charts the course of Eridanus,
smear of gold, river of stars.
So we breathe in this cradle of names,
till all the legends ever told
are strung between the Cross and the Centaur's eye.
And the storm in my small cup
spills into the woven, ecstatic quiet,
and my body floats in his hands
to the unheard tune
of our dancing.

*I sit. She climbs. She bounces.
I try to hold her still. We run.
I tease. She pushes. I pull.
We play. She goes away.*

Sam Butler

Anna Leonie

Love

He is very unkempt, with a prickly moustache and tons of orange hair. His skin is tanned and dry, and he has hard skin on the tips of his fingers from playing the guitar. The deep lines on his face and the wilting of his skin show signs of his age, reminding me that it cannot be just the two of us forever.

People ask where I'm from as if my tanned skin resembles something exotic. I answer, 'I never played inside as a child'. My dad took me everywhere and played with me anywhere, any game, any sport, and any park we would go. He would put me on his shoulders as we took countless hikes through hills and valleys. When I was tired I knew I'd be hurled up there without hesitation. I used to call him the Ox. To this day I don't know if he remembers this but he would almost routinely sing to me, romantic songs he had written about a love so strong it weakened him. I would half listen, half pick at his grey moustache noticing how it prickled my skin when I stroked upwards and felt soft and satisfying when I stroked downwards.

She knows a time of intimacy

(when she was the most)

When she, being he, came too, always

(his movements helped, not hindered by)

When they a puzzle and this piece, her, fit there

(a thing complete, and before her, nothing).

And she knows to find a new way of completing the picture

And she fights for the right to go with him again

(the roll, the squash, the hold, the clamber)

Opponents in a game of moving as one.

COMPLETE

PEOPLE ASK WHERE I'm from as if my tanned skin resembles something exotic. I answer, 'I never played inside as a child'. My Dad used to laugh at me and call me Stig of the Dump; I was always dirty with chapped lips and huge scars on me knees. I wore my school dress on holiday and only ever sported secondhand clothes. I never had a TV to watch and was only content when sinking into a pile of gravel or clambering up a tree.

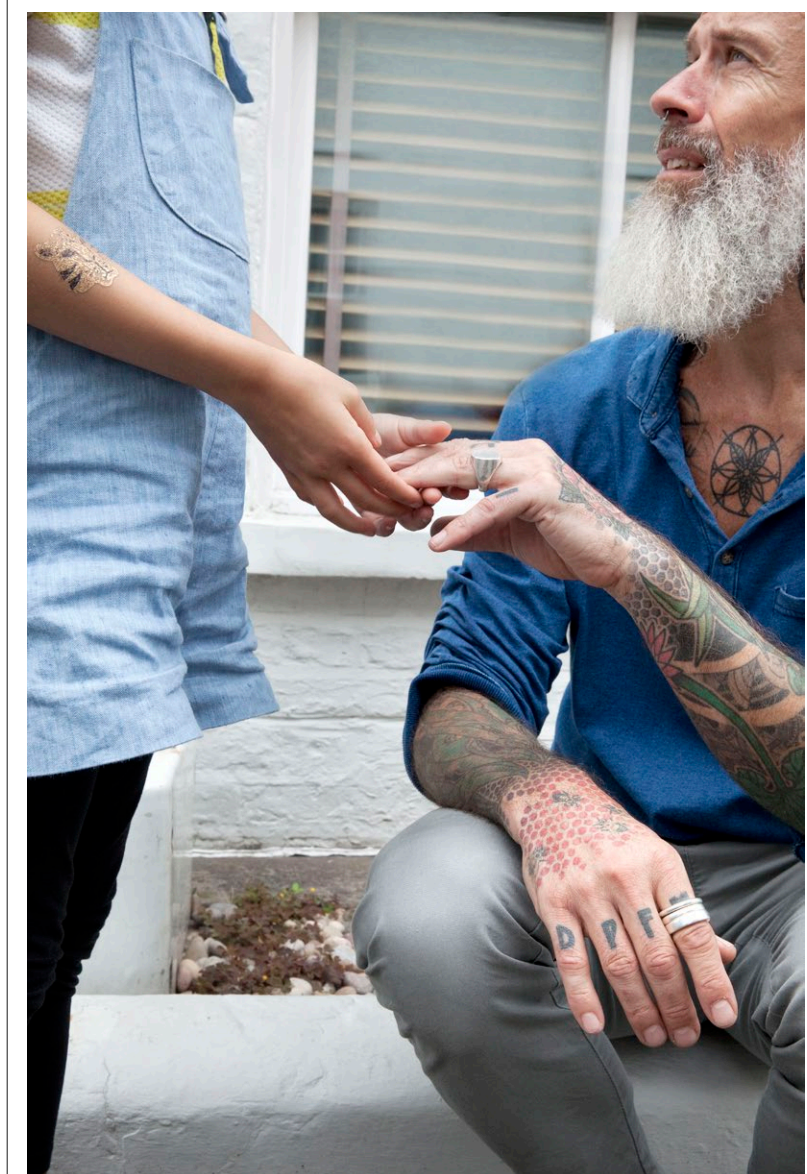
He would put me on his shoulders as we took countless walks through fields and parks. When I was tired I knew I'd be hurled up there without hesitation. I used to call him the Ox. To this day I don't know if he remembers this, but he would almost habitually tell me the same story of when my mum left. I would half listen, half twirl his orange (henna dyed) hair between my fingertips, noticing how it thinned in the middle and greyed slightly at the root. He always wore the same woven navy jumper, colourful backpack and light blue jeans with turn-ups and multiple denim patches, his attempt at hiding wear and tear.

She likes to play with my beard. Like a bird trying to make a nest.

Touch

Charlie Morrissey

It is not our eyes that tell us about the reality of the world, but touch. We learn the world through touch. It is what lets us know that we're here, that we and other things have substance. We touch and are touched by the world, and we grow and become what we are through the complex world of touch – touch has depth and colour and range, and with touch we can feel through the surface of things to what lies beyond – we are aware of the layers of things. What we see we know because we have touched it or something like it at some point. Touch is what connects us to this world and to each other – it communicates where words fail us. It's something that comes naturally to children – they learn the world through touching it and connecting how something looks with how it feels. To celebrate and champion touch is to celebrate the substance rather than the surface of life.





APPROPRIATE

Department
for Education
guidelines on
touch

Extract from safeguarding
policy of an independent
secondary girls' school

There is no area more sensitive and difficult to provide guidance for than the issue of 'touch'.

Do not touch any parts of her body, other than the hands, arms, shoulder area and top of the back. Touch will rarely be appropriate if it involves any other parts of the body.

Physical contact should take place only when it is necessary in relation to a particular activity. It should take place in a safe and open environment, one easily observed by others, and last for the minimum time necessary. Physical contact, which occurs with an individual child or young person, is likely to raise questions unless the justification for this is part of a formally agreed plan.

But how can we dance together,

how can we be together?

Sarah Tutt

David Harradine

The first rule, usually, for us adults working with children (especially us men, although it's not usually said as explicitly as that, but really, it's there, as an implicit message, especially us men), the first rule, for us adults working with children, is: don't touch. No contact. No embrace. No skin.

But how can we dance together, how can we work together, how can we be together, if we can't just be together, me in my body, you in yours, dancing, hand to hand, body to body, skin to skin?

The notion of touch and personal space is also cultural, and impacts on the relationship between men and girls. You need to witness positive touch to realise there is a normal language there – to be able to translate it well with positive meaning.



This warm surface, my very own skin, keeps you out, and keeps me in. But then we touch. Skin to skin. On a level too small for either of us to see, we brush cells into one another. A small fragment of you becomes me. A small fragment of me becomes you, just briefly, just for this while, while we're dancing

Marie Groucott

Robert Clark, performer,
talking about making the show

**I am undone
So he takes you
And he holds you
Cheek to chest
All night
The tenderest
relationship begins.**

CELEBRATE**POSITIVE**

These young girls have such desire for intimacy and contact and touch. And actually one of the things that's been strong for me throughout this process is just seeing this: not only is it a bit absent, but it's clear that it's not absent through the desire of these children; it's absent through fear.

She's saying,
"I want to touch your face and I want you to touch my face and I want to be held by you"

And I'm thinking,
"but I don't really want to touch your face or to hold you."

together, hand in hand, skin to skin. I feel your damp warm little hand as we dance. Pressure rises and falls as we move together and apart, thick beats of racing hearts. All over the surface of you, this thin layer of skin, to keep me out, and keep you in. But you let me in.

Risk

David Harradine

I love children. I love them.
I love them. In my work,
I speak passionately in
defence of their rights, to be
themselves, to be allowed
to be, to be allowed to be
creative. I love them. I love
their wild imaginations.
I love their visible emotions.
I love their brutal honesty.
I love how they swing from
care to indifference. I love
how they think, and how
they feel, and how they
move, and how they play.
I love how they dance:
abandon, freedom, self-
conscious, joyful, anxious,
happy. I'm a man who
loves children.

How can it be that that is
such a dangerous, tricky,
provocative thing to say?

Sam Butler

You run, and leap,

**I catch so you
don't**

fall

You run to me,

**I grab your
hips and spin
you around**

THERE IS A wedding in a village hall. The families come from nearby towns of traffic and noise and people, so many people. And they escape to the countryside venues at weekends and holidays and days of celebrations. Respite from the noise and many strangers.

And the little hall sits by an endless cornfield on one side and a scattering of dainty homes on the other. Like a perfectly curated gallery of countryside perfection. As the ceremony ends and the hot guests spill into the outside spaces, the town children see space and hiding and secrets; endless possibilities for shared adventure with temporary celebration-day friends.

They run and follow, they hide and seek, they tease and roam. Younger ones claiming their place in the hierarchy of play, older ones assessing their place in the order where childhood meets adulthood.

A child hangs back on the hall's boundary.

Mum. Can I please play in the corn with the others?

How does she know to ask for permission?

A quick risk assessment.

Not really. No.

Why?

How to explain.

A field of corn. Evoking nature and freedom, and the potential for harm.

You can go with the others for five minutes but then come straight back here to me. And make sure I can still see you.

A small freedom bounded by time. A parent trying to reduce the odds of the imagined risk.

She runs and runs and plays hard until well past the allotted time when she remembers the conditions of play, wrenches herself away and sprints back to the safe spot. Her mother welcomes her back with relief and soon sends her off again with a new extended time limit.

This yo-yoing contract of play and reunion between mother and child continues for the afternoon, their separation lengthening each time.

When darkness comes instinct sends the whole pack of children back towards the lights of the little hall. And the children have had a ball.

And the parents boast of how their children were allowed to play and roam and dance together, freely.

You jump,

**my hand on your
back,**



lifting you into

the air,

**our arms out-
stretched**

I throw you higher

We fall.

**We have this idea for a new project.
It'll be called *Men & Girls Dance***

Q1	What is it?	It's a project that brings men and girls together to dance.
2	Why dance?	Because we wanted to make a piece about physical relationships built on trust, play, empathy, love...
3	It's a bit weird.	Why's it weird?
4	It's a bit weird to bring men and girls together like that, to dance.	It's a piece about joy and love.
5	I don't like it. I don't think you should do it. Why would you want to do that, right now, with all that's going on right now?	Because it's important, now, right now.
6	It's dangerous.	Why?
7	It's dangerous because of all the things that might be said about it.	But it's important.
8	It's dangerous. It's a risk.	Yes, if a dance about joy and love and play and togetherness and empathy and love is a risk.
9	I know, but it's a risk.	

DANGEROUS

Matthew Morris

Andy Dawson

David Harradine

We cannot investigate or create without risk. Our work is to intelligently and subtly express what lies hidden in all our minds. If not, we risk the loss, and the loss of potential, of these empowered, positively energised and dynamic bodies. These bodies that both big people and little people share.

LOSS



I'm a man in his forties, who doesn't have children, but who often finds himself in places where there are children about. Last night I went to the bonfire in my village. Lots of families, lots of children, lots of couples. And me. Self conscious and slightly awkward, keeping finding myself watching this group of boys who were chasing each other round in the rain and the mud, lit by the fire, laughing, and then suddenly realising that there was me, this solitary man, alone at the village bonfire, watching someone else's children playing. A self-censorship: not letting myself watch for fear of being watched. Not letting myself look in case there's someone looking at me. Or at the school gates, waiting to go in, or in a theatre after a show for children, waiting for the audience to come out, or at the train station, waiting for my friends and their children to arrive. Always waiting, self conscious and on edge, aware of how I might appear to others, waiting for someone to say, "who are you, and what are you doing here, looking? You shouldn't be looking. There's nothing here for you to see."

What are relationships between men and girls like in the place where you live?

LIVING IN A former pit town makes no odds in terms of how relationships between men and girls are perceived, because of the negative reporting in the media: as a man, you are aware of the possible consequences and perceptions of interacting with girls. If a girl is lost or upset I always intervene

to ensure she is safe and protected, and you cannot help trying to be seen as a non-threatening presence.

I recently danced with my young niece at a party. She was only about five so I literally carried her in my arms. Everyone looked on with smiles and warmth.

Love
Loving
Loved

Protector
Protective
Protected

Paternal
Father
Daughter
Nurture
Care
Caring
Comfort
Curious

Play

Tender
Delicate

Angry
Anxious

Fear
Risk
Danger
Distant

Power

Trust
Freedom
Safety
Screams

Laughter
Joy

Sadness
Confusion

Censorship
Silence

Words from the show

I can feel the hairs on his arms

I can see his blue eyes blinking

I can see his slightly red cheeks

I can see him looking at me

I can hear him breathing

I can hear his pulse through his wrist

I can see the red spots on his arm

I can feel the heat of his hands on my knee

I can see the wrinkles on his elbow

I can feel the weight of him on me

I can see some moles on his arm

I can feel his curly beard

I can see his face is a bit sweaty

I can see that his beard is more than one colour

I can see him blinking

I can see him looking at his arm

I can feel the heat from his back

I can see a cut just below his thumb

I can hear him breathing and I can feel his hair on my face

I can feel his head on my leg

I can see him watching his arm and then looking at me and blinking

Kip Johnson

Auriol Bishop

Catherine Love

Reflections on the show #1

I watch this as a mother of a girl.

I watch this aware that girls are innocent, *and* learning the impact that they can have on the world.

I watch it knowing that, if I were still a girl myself, I would see it through entirely different eyes.

A huge piece of paper to be scrunched, to hide under, to cover a man. A grown man, who will do what I command. I like him. He's fun. He runs, he jumps, he can do things with his body that I would like to do. He laughs at my jokes. He is focused entirely on me.

A huge piece of paper to be scrunched, distorted, to cover a man. A metaphor for the blanket of media covering our lives. The stories they choose, the cast they put on our eyes. A man becomes an object, his confidence and kindness obscured by a mess of scrunched up newsprint that covers his head, leaves him blind and helpless, not sure which way to turn.

When the men and the girls are close, it is absolutely innocent. But the stories from those papers cast their shadow, even here.

I watch this as a mother of a girl.

And as it ends, I hope she will find this balance: the shift between being in command, and being commanded, back and forth, forth and back. And most of all, I hope she will keep her sense of fun, long after she is the age of these men, and burst through the blanket of other people's scrunched up words to stay herself.

shifting/

waiting/

looking/



Something is moving under the newspaper. It rustles and rises, tugging this way and then that. Suddenly, rearing up, the figure under this patchwork quilt of exclusive scoops and controversial columns seems like something out of a nightmare. The newspaper monster.

The headlines aren't quite visible, but I can imagine them.

There is a tenderness and a trust between the men and the girls. So many of the male dancers' gestures suggest loss: a repeated reaching out for something that is slipping away. That loss is countered, though, with a re-captured playfulness, creating a space where these two groups of human beings can simply *be* together, with each other and with us.

In the attentiveness and care of those moments, and in the strange intimacy of the eye contact made by the performers, the collective experience of performance becomes a tangible, fleeting reality.

It's just us. Together.

Reflections on the show #1

Hannah-Lily Lanyon

Allegra Galvin



This is really risky territory. It's amazing that we can raise a subject like this. It feels like an amazing thing that art can do: reclaiming a space that's been lost and then celebrating the fact that you've reclaimed that space, and being joyful about it.

I'm actually really saddened that we live in a society where it's very difficult for men and girls to be together in that way.

It crept up on me, the intimacy and tenderness that we saw and the ways in which those bodies interacted in that space.

I loved those moments of genuine communication when the girls were looking at each other and really seeing each other.

So many layers... a real intimacy and tenderness and care and gentleness, and then this real edge of anxiety. Anxiety rising.

kneeling/
smirking/
structures/
bones/
holding/

It's hard to talk to people about this performance, because a relationship of tenderness and equality between men and girls is not something that has a presence in our society. It's hard to describe something that doesn't otherwise exist.

showing/

listening/

reacting/

orbiting body/

heat/

sweat/

voice/

amplified voice/

Robert Clark, performer

Catriona Wright

Amelia Barnes, performer

Parent of one of the girls performing in the show

breath/

resting/

ledges of the body/

fingers/

proportion of bodies/

fitting/

folding/

moulding/

care/

feet softly on floor/

She walks across the space and sits next to me, wriggling to find a comfortable perch on the wooden floor. She looks at me. I smile and for a second I forget that I am caught in a loop, working to ignore my internal monologue, the voice that is desperately trying to interpret the thoughts of the audience, attempting to predict them, drawing me away from the task at hand. Her gentle and nervous smile makes me feel angry. I want to bristle, to show my teeth to the audience, I feel protective of the truth and guilty that the misinterpretations that may follow, are, in part, something that I am opening the space for them to imagine.

I forget which of us starts but one of us indicates we are ready and the other follows. The exact path differs but there are regular stops that we take when we repeat our process. Looking back I imagine it was this:
Her hand, touch, warmth, soft skin. Creases at the wrist. Old nail polish. Freckles on her arms and face. Smile (sometimes out of self consciousness, today with people watching it's more like nerves - small fear). Missing teeth, very sharp incisors. The sound of her shuffling feet, rubber soles against the floor. Old pen marks on the inside of the right arm where she has drawn on herself; black faded to blue. Green eyes (maybe). Red, auburn, curly, long hair. Blinking. Fidgeting fingers, sometimes tapping the floor, playing with her clothes. The sound of her breath. The heat of her back on my face as I listen to the creak of her body, like an old boat. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. Each breath moves me.

This moment of shared presence feels personal, almost private. Intimate in a way that is wholly OK (I've never been more sure of anything).

"It's not what you're thinking", I think. I am drawn back to the audience.

"What are you thinking? Why am I so sad? Why won't you let this just be what it is - safe, simple, a demonstration of listening and watching with care? Is it my fault that you can't, is there something weird about how I do it?"

I look at each of the eyes looking at me. Some turn away, some smile, reassuring, awkward, family, friends scanning across them. I feel hot, the skin on my face feels like it's been hit and the bruise is coming through, tight skin and tender. I might cry.

There's a sea of girls and men. The girls clamber over human climbing frames, float through the sky on joy and men's arms, and surf a newspaper wave. Yelps and yips and the odd word, like grammar, divide up the flow of movement.

That person's head can go there, that girl can talk about that man's breathing, that man can touch that girl's elbow, that girl can scoop up that wispy beard in her hands. Limits, boundaries, forbidden territory.

Q1 *What does it actually, physically feel like when you're dancing with him?*

That's hard to explain. When you're being lifted up you're in loads of different places at once.

2 *Do you feel safe?*

Yes.

3 *What does it remind you of?*

Climbing a mountain. Because he's really tall.

4 *Do you trust him?*

Yes.

When you see that, a complete stranger holding your daughter in that way, it's odd, because you think, "OK, it's just dance, they're just dancing, and she's clearly enjoying it". But at the same time, you're thinking, "well, I'm not sure about this".

So it's interesting, how it evokes that kind of feeling inside.



Being together

Sam Butler and David Harradine, artistic directors of *Fevered Sleep*, talk to Theresa Beattie about the making of **Men & Girls Dance**



Its surface simplicity conceals a lot of complexity.

TB I know you use the original version of the piece as your starting point for recreating it with local girls in each place. So where do you feel it is right now? You're on the cusp of it being reimagined and recreated with these different groups of girls.

DH That's right, and what's really exciting and very different about this project for us is that we've made the piece, it's got its choreography, its structure as a performance, and all the elements are in place, it exists as a thing, but we know that every time we re-present it, it's going to be a totally different thing, because nine of the fourteen performers are going to be different people.

TB That's a very unusual situation to be in.

SB It really is.

DH And I'm really looking forward to finding out what it is every time we do it, because we just don't know.

something that started conversations,

PROVOCATIVE

It's just some men and some girls dancing

...even our attempt to be completely transparent and open about what this piece is, causes anxiety or raises questions. And that's a good thing.

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SB We have about two weeks to recreate it. There are certain sections of the piece that will be the same in every place, and within that, there will be variations; opportunities for the local girls to move according to how they move, and to work with the same ideas that we gave to the original girls, but to respond in their own ways. There's enough time to make those discoveries which we know are so important to the girls and to the piece. And to us as directors.

POLITICAL

DH I have the sense that one of the things which makes the piece strong as an experience for audiences, is the simple, the really simple thing of just bringing together these different groups of people: just this group of girls being together with this group of men, and then this group of performers being together with this group of people called the audience.

TB And it's a political act – to put the men and the girls into a space with others witnessing.

SB Yes, and we know this from our different periods of research and development, when we only did two or three days at a time, and then presented it to an audience, there was still a very strong response.

DH A big impact. And I think the title is part of that, part of why the piece has an impact. The title is deliberately simple and descriptive. It's just *Men & Girls Dance* and what's the piece? It's just some men and some girls dancing.

TB It's very honest, and I think that transparency is important in how people initially engage with it.

SB Yeah, but at the same time as we're saying, "it's just this", there's the chance that people are thinking, "well yes, but it's all these other things as well isn't it?"

TB They'll bring all their own...

SB ...all their own stuff.

DH And that's why the title works. It's simple, and yet it opens up

lots of things. The performance itself works in the same way. Its surface simplicity conceals a lot of complexity, and it conceals politics, and it conceals a lot of emotion in this very simple way, simply by bringing together these different people. Like the title: it is completely descriptive, it's totally factual, but also, people find it quite provocative, just the thought of what the piece is, it's just some men and girls dancing, that's all it is. But the thought of men and girls dancing, we know from talking with people, and we know from what people have said and how people have responded in lots of different ways...

SB ...that even our attempt to be completely transparent and open about what this piece is, causes anxiety or raises questions. And that's a good thing.

DH That's a really good thing.

SB The piece relies on the people who are watching it bringing those questions with them, and I guess what the piece is trying to do is propose some different sorts of answers to those questions.

TB And if people who are going to come and see it get a copy of the newspaper before they see the show, then maybe it would enrich the questioning.

DH I think so. I think that's exactly what we want the newspaper to do as well. *Men & Girls Dance* as a project is more than just *Men & Girls Dance* the show. There are three things: there's the performance, which of course is at the heart of it; there's this newspaper, which accompanies the show and explores its themes and some of the questions around it; and there's a whole other programme of conversations and encounters and different opportunities for people to come together and talk about the project and its themes.

TB That's quite unusual, for a project to have so many different elements.

SB Yeah, but we always wanted it to be more than just a show. We've always wanted it to be something that started conversations, and got people thinking and talking, because, as you said before, it's political.

DH And it's exploring things that we think need talking about.

BOUNDARIES

TB I remember a conversation in Nottingham, after some early version of the project, when you had a post-show discussion. And as a woman who doesn't have children, I found myself in a conversation that I'm not normally part of, because I'm not part of that world and I didn't feel informed in the way that a mother, a teacher, or a grandmother could be informed, and it really resonated because I was really quite shocked by some of the things that people found disturbing and difficult in what you'd shown. I didn't find these things shocking at all, and I wondered if that was to do with having been around dance a lot, and being quite comfortable with people touching each other, maybe I was bringing that with me. You're working with

and got people thinking and talking

young girls who don't necessarily have dance experience, who don't necessarily want to be dancers, but I'm very aware from my own experience of the whole issue of touching in teaching, and how different that is in different cultures. Sometimes there are no boundaries at all. In some cultures, if a male teacher wants to show a girl how to use her inner thigh muscle he will just physically put it in the right position. That's completely accepted as practice.

DH I think that's an important thing to think about, how different people and people's different experiences really affect what they see when they watch the show. It goes back to what we were talking about before, about the piece partly being about what people bring to it. It can be a totally different show, depending on who's watching it.

AUDIENCES

SB And very different types of audiences will come. When we originally conceived it, I suppose we imagined it being mainly for a dance audience, for people who go to see a lot of dance, but it's also for an audience who may only ever see dance in the context of their local community centre where they take their child to dance lessons. For many people, going to see your daughter's end of term dance show doesn't translate into then going out to see other types of dance and having a vocabulary of dance understanding, but we want the show to be open to all these people, it needs to be.

POSSIBILITIES

DH One of the brilliant things about the project is that it might open up some different possibilities for what people think dance and dancing is, and also open up some different possibilities for who gets to dance with who. So it's not always just the professionals dancing with the professionals, or the adults with the adults, or the children with the children, or the girls with the girls because there aren't enough boys for girls and boys to dance together. Actually there are different people who can come together and dance.

SB There's a reason we chose those very different types of people, because they can open up so many more possibilities.

TB I don't know the ages of the male dancers, but they look quite intergenerational. I was thinking about the fathers and grandfathers and other men watching. There's something important about who you see on stage.

SB Yes, it's really important that the audience are seeing men there who could be a father or an older brother, or in fact a grandfather.

DH For some parents of the girls, when they encounter this piece, it can be very unusual and unlike any performance or dance that they've encountered before. But they still seem to embrace it, and I think they embrace it and

can celebrate it for what it is because their daughter is in it. That's a source of pride and it's an entry point for them as parents and as adults into a world of dance that might not be the world they're usually in.

SB I think it also goes back to what we were talking about at the start. It's a really, really simple piece, it's simply about people being together. What's inaccessible about that? Nothing. It's so accessible and so open, there's no trickery or artifice.

DH Sam and I have become really interested in working with dance and dancers, as opposed to theatre and actors, because what we've always disliked about a certain kind of theatre is the artifice of it. We're just not interested in people pretending to be other people. We're just not interested in places pretending to be other places. We just don't get it. So I think then taking a step into dance makes complete sense. We've thought, "let's just call what we make dance. Let's just get some dancing, moving, living, breathing bodies into a space with some other dancing, moving, living, breathing bodies and let things happen". That realisation of how we could work has been fantastic, and that simple "let's just get some bodies together", that's at the heart of *Men & Girls Dance*.

TB Yes, it's all about bodies, but something else that struck me in the show was the use of words. Words are important in the world that you've created. There's a section where the girls are observing, they're saying, "Now he's moving..."

SB They describe what the man is doing. "He is... moving his hand towards the floor..."

TB That's right. The accuracy of those descriptions really made me think about how we underestimate children and young people sometimes. It really made me think about that. But also what catches their eye, I found so interesting. And a sense of exploration that they had in that moment of



so all they're doing is something really simple, really generous and careful and caring with their fellow performer,

WATCHING

It's so accessible and so open,

but there's definitely an iceberg of anxiety and questions and not-sure-ness for the audience. And that of course is intentional.

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PLAYFULNESS



there's no trickery or artifice

performance, a kind of freshness, which was very engaging. One of my questions was, how do you keep that playfulness, that sense of discovery when there's an audience there and when it's being recreated so many times?

SB That's why we wanted much of it to remain improvised. I mean, I think it's really difficult for the girls themselves rehearsing something which is improvised, because they might have an awareness in the live moment that they've already said or done something, "Did I say that the last time I did it?" When we've directed them, we've asked them just to respond exactly to what the man is doing. I remember telling them not to embellish, not to interpret. And it's a tricky thing. "Don't add anything to it, tell us exactly what he is doing and only talk about his body, because it is a piece about bodies. Really clear simple descriptions, that's all we want you to do."

TB And in a way that's a little bit like the title, deceptive simplicity and then an iceberg.

DH Exactly, because of course in that example, the tip of the iceberg is just this girl describing this man that she's performing with. But beneath that we're all thinking, "Why is she saying this? What is it that she's describing? Why is he doing this?"

At another point in the show it's reversed so there's a man studying a girl's body and describing what he can see and feel and hear and smell of her. In both those cases, the task that the performer



has is very simple: it's about observing this person and saying what you're experiencing or what you can see. But of course, as you say, for the audience it's more complex, because we're not used to children studying adults and children being empowered like that. And we're certainly not comfortable with the idea of an adult very closely observing and looking at and studying a child. Especially an adult man studying and looking at a girl, and describing that. And so all they're doing is something really simple, really generous and careful and caring with their fellow performer, but there's definitely an iceberg of anxiety and questions and not-sure-ness for the audience. And that of course is intentional.

SB As an adult, there are only certain settings where it's part of the rules of engagement for an adult to really look at a child's body, like in a classical dance environment, or in P.E. lessons in schools and in special situations where it's their job to look carefully and observe. In these situations looking is OK, but in the wider world outside of those examples it's precisely the opposite, especially for men, it's really not OK.

PREDATOR

DH I've certainly experienced that. Eye contact and looking is so politicised and so troubled. It's quite a thing. Last November I went to the bonfire in my village, and it was really cold, and raining, and there were these three boys with their tops off, just trousers and shoes on and naked on the top half, in the rain, running around in the crowd, having this brilliant time, with this massive fire blazing behind them, and I was so fascinated by them I spent quite a lot of time watching them. They were just trying to get as wet and muddy as possible. I was watching them because it was so joyful to watch, and I suddenly realised that I was a man by himself, in the middle of a crowd of mainly parents and their children, watching these three semi-naked boys rolling in the mud, and I suddenly realised that the parents were looking at me looking at their children. And, it was an awful moment because I knew exactly what they were thinking and I realised that I couldn't do what I was doing, which was simply enjoying being part of the community where some children wanted to play like that, and where I was part of that. I wasn't part of it, I was suddenly completely outside of it, just because I'd been looking.

SB You become that 'stranger'.

DH The predator. "Why are you looking at my child like that?" "Because I love what he's doing, because it's brilliant."

SB Maybe they weren't thinking that. It's what you *think* they were thinking.

DH Of course maybe they weren't thinking that, maybe they were thinking, "Oh look at him, he's really enjoying this", but you never know. I could list a hundred examples of things like that. It's a

That's what *Men & Girls Dance* is, a space in which men and girls, and girls and men can play, can respect, can be tender, can have empathy, and can love. For anybody to find themselves in a space like that is such a rare and wonderful thing.



WATCHING

RESPECT

"this really is alright, these men, they're really wonderful men..."

real thing, and in those moments in the show that you were talking about, we're reclaiming the right for people to be with each other in lots of ways. By being physical together, by dancing together, by looking at one another, by talking about one another.

TB The only other place I can think of where that sometimes happens is at a big wedding. A big wedding is a place where a grown up man might dance with a little girl, and where people might stare, be allowed to.

SB And where dancing is part of a celebration.

TB You were talking earlier about the process of making the show again in each place. Can we talk a bit more about the process?

NATURAL

DH Yes, it raises a lot of questions. We have to take the performers, all of them, on a journey with us, so that it's possible for them to improvise and to be really natural and be themselves as people, which is what we want, just themselves, in front of an audience, as well as dancing some quite intricate choreography. And that's challenging for any performer. I think the key to it being possible is just about me and Sam creating the right kind of space. And it's a rare space, which is why the project is – I think – important. We create a space which is completely about trust and respect and care and tenderness and playfulness and love. That's what *Men & Girls Dance* is, a space in which girls and men can play, can respect, can be tender, can have empathy, and can love. For anybody to find themselves in a space like that is such a rare and wonderful thing.

SB It's about the girls having the right to be themselves and having the right to enter into relationships with other people, both girls and adults, and that's really empowering for them. What we're also trying to do is for the girls to have a sense of how important they are in this piece, and how brilliant, and how unique they are.

TB It also seems to be a very sad indictment of our society that this construct needs to be created in order for that to happen. As an audience we have to come to you to witness it, because it's not allowed. It has to be choreographed because it's not allowed.

SURPRISE

DH We see that people are moved by it, and I think that's exactly why. For people in the audience, becoming part of that can be quite a powerful experience. But the fact that it's a temporary experience is moving and upsetting, because as you say it shouldn't have to be like that. It shouldn't have to be that you have to go to a special place for an hour to be part of that coming together of people in that way. But it is. It's a fact. We have to make those occasions happen because they don't happen very much in the ordinary world, in the everyday world.

SB It goes back to what you were saying about creating a space to let the performers just be themselves. Very early on in the rehearsal process we tell them that, and for the girls it's often a surprise, I know it is. Because when they come they think they're going to be doing some very snazzy choreography and maybe some lovely leaps and lifts and turns and maybe some splits, and very quickly we get rid of all that and tell them not to think about the moves that they're going to be making, but just to be themselves in this space with these men and with us, because we're part of that as well, me and David, we're part of that equation.

TB How does it feel for you being the only mature woman in that space?

SB There's just me and a female chaperone each time. Well the fact is, it's quite common for a woman to be with a group of children. That's a really common scenario.

DH It's us men who find it more unusual.

RESPONSIBILITY

SB And maybe I feel a sense of responsibility to the girls and the parents as the female director. To say, "this really is alright, these men, they're really wonderful men. This is my lovely friend David and these dancers, we've chosen them and we know they're very talented and brilliant. But they're also very lovely." I think I probably say that a lot. Probably too much. There is that feeling of responsibility. I'm the woman and I'm going to make sure you're alright. Maybe it doesn't need to be said. But it is a concern. Maybe I'm aware also, because I'm a parent, "what are the parents thinking they're sending their daughters into?" And I always want to be out there with the parents when they drop the girls off, as if to say, "It's alright, I'm here."

DH Even though Sam's a woman, she's still, like me, set slightly apart, because we're the directors, so the performers naturally feel more connected to each other because they're different from us. We talk with the girls and we talk with the men, the professional dancers, in exactly the same way. There's no hierarchy, there's no difference in language, in directorial tone, there's no difference in how we give notes or how precise, or how strict or generous we are.

we're reclaiming the right for people to be

with each other in lots of ways

They're just the company, all of them together. The fact that they're different ages and different sexes is neither here nor there. I think that says something really powerful to them.

SB That's true. The girls make such a deep bond so quickly with the men as fellow performers, and as directors we're slightly outside of that. I think they want to be with the men, and then there's David and Sam who are slightly irritating because we make them do the work rather than just letting them play.

DH The strength of some of those relationships between the men and the girls is astonishing, to the extent that sometimes they just get incredibly close. The girls absolutely want to be with the men, on them, held by them, climbing on them, sitting on them, with them, all the time, and the men want it too, because they love it, those men love those girls in that context and in that process, as fellow performers. But even in that context and even in that process, and even in this project, even me and Sam at one point said, "Is this OK, or actually is this not OK?"

SB I remember talking about that, and we concluded it was OK, and we were just getting caught up in the whole anxiety thing.

DH And I think that's OK too, isn't it? I think that was part of our responsibility as directors.

TROUBLED

SB It was quite striking, just the intensity of it. And we all know that performers form intense relationships, because they have to, because they have to do this really difficult thing together in public. When you just allow that to be, something really powerful can happen, and something troubling, which is sometimes what we want. We want people to be troubled.

TB I think that's a good word.
DH To be troubled by witnessing playful, tender relationships. Why should that be troubling? But it is, and that's why the piece feels – I keep resisting saying important, I don't want to say that the piece that we've made is important – but I think the fact that we are exploring this subject matter, well, that does feel important.

SB If we weren't doing it, it would be important that someone else was.

TB I wondered about the dads. Whether the dads of the girls had found a different physicality being introduced into their lives?

SB Well maybe. That's something we haven't found out yet. I see it in my daughter. She's twelve, and she's tiny and she wants to wrestle with her father, she demands it and she puts in his diary, "We need to wrestle", for when he gets home from work. It's really funny. He's really tired, "I haven't got time to wrestle", but it's important to her, because she remembers that physical closeness with him, which she doesn't have any more.

To her it's really important, being with him in that way.

TB Often in the performance it's the girl that's driving that physicality. You have, if you like, the conventional imbalance of the height and weight and strength, and yet it's the girl who's finding the architecture of the male body.
DH Definitely, and as directors that was one of the really fantastic things about making the piece, because the physical differences opened up lots of choreographic potential which just doesn't exist in the same way with adults dancing together.

SB There are things that can happen physically, that can only happen because there's somebody that's six-foot-five dancing with somebody who's four-foot-six.

DH The physical reality of their difference is something that we really quickly realised could be a fantastic starting point for creating material. That was at the heart of the devising of the choreography, simply working with that and asking the dancers to improvise with it. In a more considered and intended way, we were also really clear that we didn't want the men to be doing all the lifting and holding and initiating and to have all the strength. Of course they often did because you can do glorious things when you're six-foot-five and you've got a tiny girl who can clamber over you, and she loves it. But often the girls are initiating, they're the ones doing the climbing or taking the weight of the men. They're leading, they're directing. The combination of those two things, the visible, physical, normality of big muscly men and short slender girls, and then subverting that to give the girl the strength and the power and the initiative and let the man be the follower and the responder and the supported. Playing with those two things, flicking between them, that's a big part of the choreographic language of the piece.

SB And we do still have to make sure that that happens, because it's so easy for the male, because he's stronger, because he's bigger, because he's a trained

« The physical reality of their difference is something that we really quickly realised could be a fantastic starting point for creating material.

PHYSICALITY

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We live in a world of suspicion

something powerful, something troubling

TENDER



INITIATING

We want people to be troubled

dancer and he can choreograph, and of course he's the adult. And we might say, "please work on this idea now, go off and play with that", and he is usually initiating it, in terms of the devising process. So we had to always make sure that that balance was shifting back again. And adjust the choreography accordingly.
DH That's our work as directors, our work as choreographers, isn't it?

TB It's that calibration isn't it?
DH Yes, that's a good word.

TB I think all that attention to the difference between the men and the girls, and how you can work with that, is so clear. And it's the heart of the piece, isn't it? These different groups of people working together.

SB It's absolutely the heart of the piece.

TB We were talking about the word 'important' earlier, and the sense that it's an important project. I've heard you say elsewhere that by exploring how people might be together, by exploring that in the performance, you're starting to model how we all might live. That feels really important. Particularly for the times we're living in now.

SB We live in a world of suspicion.

PROBLEMATIC

DH We do, and the piece is caught up in that. When we first imagined this project it wasn't the piece that we have created. The first starting point for the project was simply an image of some young girls who do ballet, probably in their pink tutus, dancing with a group of big, sweaty, muscular contemporary dancers who were men. Because it just so happens that we'd come into contact with both these groups in quick succession and Sam said, "it would be amazing, because they're so different, to bring them together". It was a purely aesthetic, visual thing. "Wouldn't it be great to put these girls doing ballet against these men doing their thing?" But as soon as we started talking with people about it, it very rapidly became about something else. People didn't react to the aesthetics of ballet against contemporary dance, or the playfulness of bringing these two groups together, people responded to their own anxieties about that, about men and girls – the very idea of doing it was problematic.

SB We had a lot of, "There's something creepy about this idea, and I just don't think that this project is going to work."

DH Which is precisely why we had to make it. So it went from an image and a playful aesthetics of different dance forms, into something absolutely political, and I think we wanted to make something that does something...

SB ...if what it does is to get people thinking or feeling differently...

DH ...then it's doing something political, just by doing that...

TB ...it's about the traces, different kinds of traces...

DH Yes, it's about what we leave with people, whether something has shifted as people walk out of that space, whether something's different from when they walked in. That feels like success and that feels political, and yes, it feels important.

TB And the way you describe that process of discovering what the project might be is another iceberg isn't it? As you described, you put together your contemporary dancers and your ballet girls and this whole iceberg underneath it is revealed. It's about revealing layers.

UNSAID

DH So much of which is unsaid. We're working with the body and physicality as a way of communicating. It's not about saying things, it's about doing things, and about being. That's why we've made a dance piece rather than a theatre piece in which people talk a lot about the difficult times in which we live, in which there is dialogue about how it's difficult for adults and children to be together. We didn't want to talk about it, we wanted to do it, and to reclaim it as a physical relationship that can be positive.

TB It's a cusp isn't it, this cusp between theatre and dance, these very live thresholds that you're playing on. And this cusp between performers just being together and dancing, and them doing something political, that feels important. Because that's alive, and dangerous, and a really interesting place.

LIBERATING

DH Both of the metaphors that you've used a lot are very double edged – the iceberg, the tip of the iceberg and the submerged, dangerous dark mass of it – and then the cusp, being on the edge of something, a bit of a precipice. With an iceberg there's something very beautiful but deadly, and being on a cusp feels both liberating and like you might drop off, and drop to your death. And that feels right for this piece doesn't it?

SB It really does. It's a beautiful, celebratory piece, but there is a lot of danger in it. Not for the performers, but I think there's danger for us, for *Fevered Sleep*. **DH** We've prepared a document which has all of the accusations and all of the difficult questions, and all of the reasons why we shouldn't have done the project, and in this document we have our answers too, so we can speak back – if and when – in the press or in a conversation with a member of the audience. If the anxiety and suspicion in this territory that we've talked about gets directed back at us or back at the performance, we can keep it for what it is, which is something wholly positive.

TB That's so shocking. That you've felt like you've had to make that document.

DH I think we have to be prepared to fight a little bit for the right of

they become carriers of it too, carriers of this possibility of being

together positively with other people, they carry that possibility

back into their communities.



ACCUSATIONS

but there's a lot of danger in it

It's not just about what they do with us,

it's about what we leave with people, whether something has shifted as people walk out of that space, whether something's different from when they walked in.

QUESTIONS

it's about what they take home with them,

and take out in to the world.

and take to the other adults that they interact with.

PHYSICAL

the piece to be what it is, and we have to work really hard all the time to refuse people the right to turn the piece into something that it isn't.

SB Like we said before, from our very first idea people have turned what it is into something else, so we wouldn't be surprised.

DH It's so clear what it is, what the piece is and what the performers' relationships are. I keep saying 'wholly positive' because it is wholly positive. I'll defend it to the wire if needs be.

TB The tour will take you to quite different places, and I imagine the work is going to be tested quite differently depending on where you're recreating it. Who the girls might be, who the audiences might be, who the parents will be, and the venue.

DH It will be tested differently, or received differently, and we've made that choice, we've made a choice about where to present this work, and we've made what feels like the right choices because we want to start real conversations about real questions, and real issues and real challenges and real opportunities with real people. And we could have, I think we probably could have if we'd wanted to – we've got good relationships – we could have made it possible to present this piece in two or three of the good established dance houses, where there's a very particular audience who are very dance-literate and who probably read a certain kind of newspaper, and do a certain kind of thing and have a certain kind of politics. But we're doing precisely the opposite of that. Because that would have been too easy. So we haven't made an easy job for ourselves but I think we made choices because we want the piece to be real.

SB It's going to be so fascinating, meeting the girls of Folkestone, the girls of Nottingham, the girls of Huddersfield or Salford or Brighton or London, or wherever we make the show in the future. They're going to be so different from each other. I can't wait. I'm excited and slightly terrified.

TB It's touched me very deeply, even the relatively small amount of exposure I've had to it. I think it's really important work.

DH It's been a brilliant project for us, but it's raised a lot of questions,

a lot of challenges about the process, the partnerships, the touring model. It's a difficult piece. But we've had some really strong companions along the way who've helped us keep it going. **SB** We have our company planning meetings, when we've been piecing together a schedule for the next few years and we've got lots of different projects and wildly different ideas but one of the questions is, "when will *Men & Girls Dance* end?" And we've said it will end when it's no longer necessary. So I think that means it might not end.

TB No.

COMMITMENT

DH We've made a commitment to it and what's great about that, because of the model of it, is that it's possible just to do another residency, another residency, another residency, and keep going.

TB But then you won't retain the same men. It's inevitable that they'll get other work. So if it carries on for a few years, because it will be necessary, quite a few different men will become carriers of that experience into the world and also into the contemporary dance sector, and that's very exciting.

DH And what's amazing about the girls' involvement is that they become carriers of it too, carriers of this possibility of being together positively with other people, they carry that possibility back into their communities. It's not just about what they do with us, it's about what they take home with them, and take out in to the world, and take to the other adults that they interact with.

SB If they're allowed to.

DH If they're allowed to, yes, and we can't control that, we have to let that go. We have to let them go. But hopefully they'll feel a bit more empowered, having had all of us tell them how amazing they are, and having had the experience of being together and being part of this piece.

It's a beautiful, celebratory piece,

Gillian Clark

It is very rare to see a company that consists of adults and children, of adult men and young girls, in which it feels as if the children are equal members of the company. The girls are able to exercise a control and have an authority in the performance that brings a delicate balance to the power imbalance between adult and child, male and female.

The girls invite the men to play – and the men invite the girls to dance.



There is the possibility of whirling, or being whirled through the air, of carrying or being carried, of climbing upon or being climbed on.

But the monster – the shadow – is constantly present, for there is continual risk.

CONNECTION

Matthew Morris, performer

Reflections on the show #2

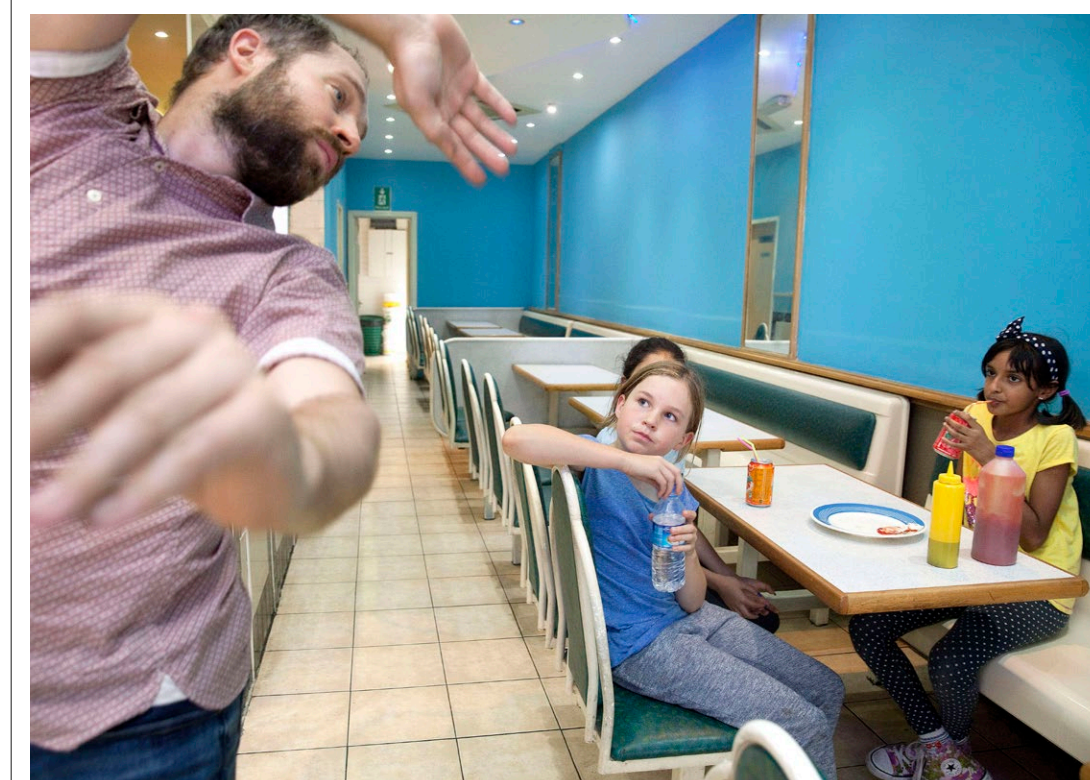
I'm flooded with metaphors and stories and the sort of stuff we're filled with in society, yet once you're immediately engaged and working with those girls physically in the space all that disappears and there's this real human connection. You're filled with all this other noise: emotional noise, society's noise, but once you're in the middle of it, everyone's human, and there's just this beautiful human nature.

SHADOW

Nicola Shaughnessy

This is an extraordinary piece. Extraordinary because of its naturalness, simplicity and beauty as men and girls play together. It is extraordinary because of being on the borders of respectability and taboo as the innocence of the 8-11 year old girls encounters and interacts with the ageing bodies of older male dancers, all imbued with the grace and control of professional training, complementing the untrained grace of the girls, at ease with their bodies. The interaction is extraordinary in its profundity. It moves us through its physicality as men and girls touch, creating an intimacy that makes the audience feel privileged to be participants. We are not voyeurs, but we are aware of ourselves watching an experience being shared. We have been given permission to participate in something that verges on the unpermissible. This is extraordinary because of its originality.

We see men who take themselves seriously and are taken seriously as dancers, learning seriously from young girls who enjoy their power seriously, as performers.



Sophie Eustace

Nicola Shaughnessy

It was just about being with people. Simplicity and complexity. A new language. The voice and dance. The language of the body (unspeakable).

He's covered in newspaper. A suit of invisibility. Totally covered.

Newspaper. Hideous stories. Beautiful.

The desire of the girls for intimacy and touch. Deep play. "I want to touch your face and be touched by you and be held by you."

They dance around him, circling. Eye contact leads to touch. They mould each other. Man looks at girl. Girls mould to man.

No priors. No habits. Just natural and healthy relationships with bodies. Being at ease with bodies and with touch.

Louise Blackwell

I remember a girl being thrown in the air with glorious abandon; a description of heartbeats, skin and sweat; a huge newspaper monster swallowing the girls; confidence, fragility, power; music; the electric mood; playful watching and copying; togetherness.

Kip Johnson, performer

Rachel Betts

Reflections on the show #2

It was a statement, a bridging point, a moment to say through movement to the audience,

*this is all it is folks,
plain as day,*

*no dark corners,
just two bodies in space being together.*

She climbs over him, weaves through his arms and legs, around his head and neck, slips through his hands like water or sand. Her face is open, wide open to all the possibilities of the future, not yet closed off by fear or cynicism.

He is still, watching her with wonder and trying to recall what it felt like to be free. It's buried deep inside him covered over by fear and all the other things he's learned being a man. The joy she radiates is infectious and he holds his breath as she reaches out, not wanting to break the spell. The moment of warmth and tenderness between them is almost too painful to watch. She invites him to play, to forget who is an adult and who is a child but just play together as equals. He shakes off everything he knows about being a grown up and joins her.



There was no awkwardness or shrinking, because at that moment, my role was to send out all of the playfulness, honesty and expression that I was receiving from her as she danced around me.

The bodies unwrap themselves from the tide that traps them and dance and play freely. Everyone knows how real and tender this is and that's why no one moves. It's on the edge. Electric. The men tread carefully as the newspaper cracks. I can hear my pen scratching the paper. I can feel the warmth of a man's leg next to me. I didn't realise we were touching until that moment.

Why is it so complex to view something for what it is or to see what is just there?



Our perception is a weave of our memory, history, habits, agendas, fears, likes and dislikes. We 'write' a story, perhaps our story, in the process of seeing.

Performance can do more than simply affirm what we think we know. It can offer a rare opportunity to view something on terms other than our own.

Words from the show

He was leaning back

He was looking to the ground

He was looking around the room

He was resting one of his hands on his knees

He was touching his forehead

He was breathing

He was moving his arms in front of his chest

He was moving his arms so they touched the ground

He was raising one of his feet slightly off the ground

He was breathing

He was moving his arms around his chest

He was looking through his legs

He was making a pattern with his fingers

He was moving his hand in front of his head

He was looking to the ground

He was moving his arms behind his legs

He was walking away

He was gone.



Trust

Auriol Bishop

Relationships between men and girls are about power and trust, and those things can go one way or another. I hope that we can raise our children – boys and girls – to trust in each other, and to share the power.

Alexandra Butler

Chase me round when I'm ready. And

Catch me.

And swing me round again. And get me.

You have to keep getting me.

Do the thing where you put me upside down and pretend to drop me

But you catch me.

And when I'm not ready, really do drop me.

Pick me up and run down the hill so I'm really scared you're going to fall down.

And hold me up in the air like a bird and make the sky.

Pretend to snuggle me up like I'm your baby but really you're going to gobble me up.

And do that thing where you pretend to throw me in the sea – but you don't.

And carry me home.

Beth Goodchild
(for Brian Goodchild
4.6.36 – 22.6.15)

As a child,
I would stand
on an out-
stretched
branch, close
my eyes and
fall forward,
body rigid,
knowing that
my father,
waiting below,
would catch
me. My trust
was absolute.
My father
would not
drop me. My
father would
not desert me.
My father
would not let
me down.

Cat Stobbs

I WAS LUCKY enough to live a fifteen-minute walk from my primary school, and somewhere along the way I met Mr. Gerry. He was a widower who lived in a house on the same road as my school. I'm not sure if he just happened to be out in his front garden, or if he waited at his gate to say hello to the children on their way past; either way, on these journeys to school, me and Mr. Gerry became friends.

I would see him quite a lot as I was walking about, on my way to a friend's house or to the shops, and he always stopped to walk with me. I was young and he was old, so we probably walked at the same speed.

I don't remember all of our conversations, but I have a card that I once received from Mr. Gerry, a 'congratulations' card for finishing primary school. The bottom of the card is signed, 'from your friend Gerry' with a p.s., 'don't forget me, will you?'

And I haven't. Not because he wrote it in a card, but because when I was young a man who was a stranger took the time to become my friend.

Performers describing parts of the show

I was all out of breath from running. We stood, looking at all these people, who were looking at us. I was breathing really deeply. He was stood next to me, and he was breathing really deeply too. I could feel the heat coming off him. We looked, and they looked, and we looked, and looked, and looked, and then we turned and walked away.

HOLD

I pushed my fingers into his beard, and leant in close to his head, and whispered in his ear, and laughed, and my breath in his ear made him laugh too.

I put my hands on her hips and lifted her, up, and swung her up, and ran with her, and down, and lifted her up again, up and across and down, up and down, running, running together, my hands on her hips, her hands on my hands.

She was so light in my arms, so easy to hold, so easy to play with, so easy to dance with.

LIFTED

I sat in his lap as he sat on the floor watching the others dance.

Play

Can I climb you
 can I reach the
 top of you can I be
 as big as you can
 you hold me can
 you take this can
 I hurt you do you
 mind this do you
 like me do you see
 me I can touch
 you I can lean on
 you I can move
 your mouth I can
 take your gaze I
 can smell you I
 can be with you
 you are like me
 you are not like
 me I like you.

mine reaching up,
 hers reaching down,
 her knees bent,
 wobbling,
 us laughing,
 me gripping,
 determined not to let her fall,
 as she stands on my shoulders,
 nine feet tall,
 taller together,
 a new creature,
 two faces,
 four hands,
 trembling,
 laughing,
 one.



Her little feet pushing into my
 shoulders,
 trembling,
 the weight and lightness of her,
 our hands,



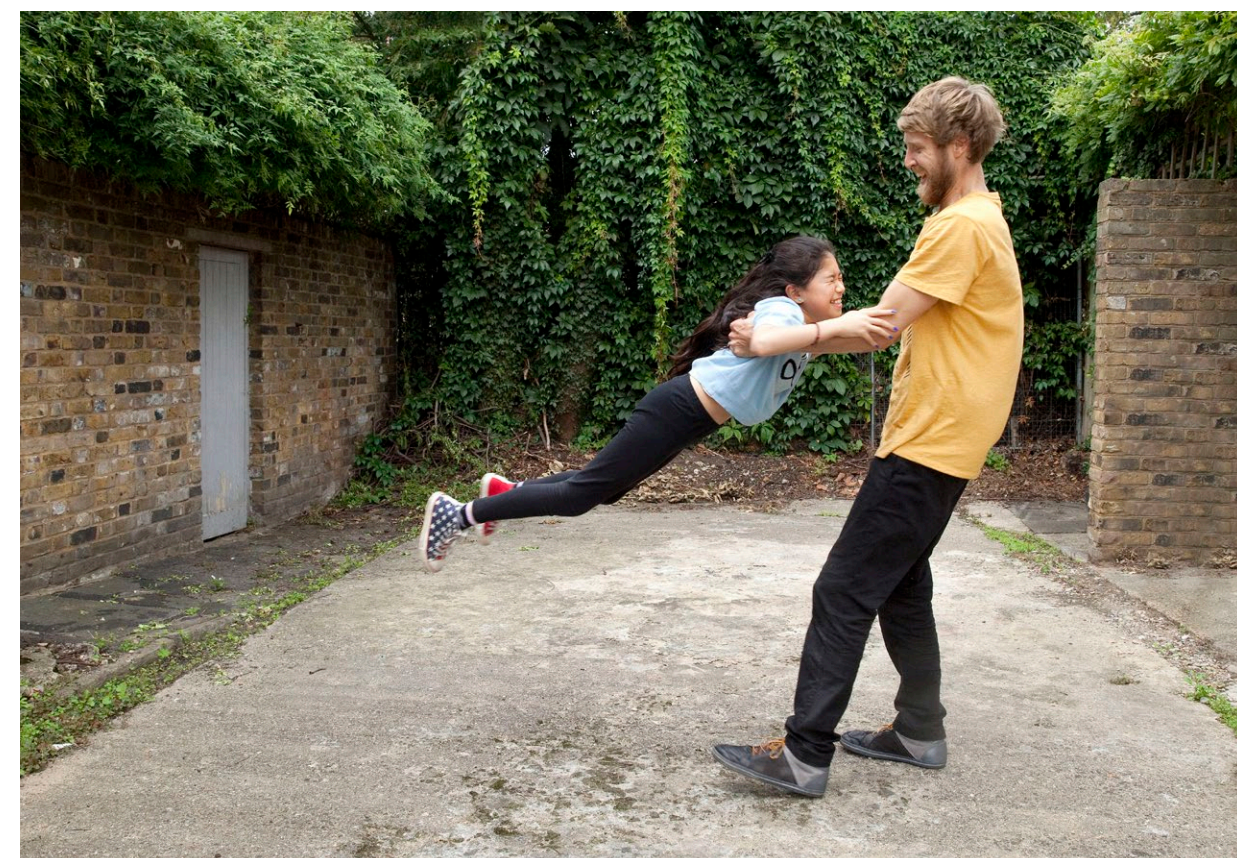
LAUGHING

REMEMBER

Ben Robinson

Play

HOME



We wrestle all the time.

In fact she waits for me to come home
and I am allowed to do nothing until I wrestle.

She is not allowed to poke me in my ribs

I am not allowed to tickle

it lasts for half an hour and then I can move on.

Her days when she would travel on my shoulder
are long gone

but I remember

vividly

I can also feel her weight on my shoulders now

sometimes she just fell asleep up there

her cheek laying on my head.

I trust her and I don't trust her.

Dance

Sam Butler

They take each other by the hand and find their starting spot, assume positions, counting the music inside and sensing the start of their dance. The dance made for them alone; her dance, made by him. He, elegant and strong and skilful, she tiny against his frame and 25 years apart. She's learned the moves, the intricacies of the form, the where to place her head, the how to turn the toe, the when to land the heel, the sway, the bob, the bounce, the dip, and she's learned from him in his tender, confident, serious, playful, hard way.

As they practise the dance in a lesson for one, the room slowly fills with adults for the next class. They each find a chair around the perimeter of the floor. They change into their dance shoes. But they are watching her. They are watching with awe as a girl child dances like a tiny woman; a full swing of the hips, a sharp flick of the head, a gleeful performing face, and a brief intense meeting of eyes. The way they wish they could dance, the way they wish they could dance with him.

David Harradine

Then she stumbles. The dance stalls. She giggles and skips off and she's just a girl again, a girl that dances with a man.

Why do people dance?

I dance so that I remain a child.

I dance so that I remember who I am.

I dance with you to tell you that I love you (so that you can feel it, so that I don't have to tell you).

I dance to lose myself.

I dance to find myself.

The wedding is done, the food has been eaten, speeches made and the band starts up. An empty dance floor awaits, but nobody ventures to be the first. Then suddenly two or three girls in wonderful outfits bought just for the wedding venture on and dance. Some of them decide to encourage the men to come and dance, even older men like me. A graceful hand pulls you up and you move about with the music. Who can refuse such an invitation? As I struggle to remember some dance move from long ago the music brings back memories. I feel better for dancing. The laughter and cheerfulness and friendliness of the girls is infectious. A few dances later the band needs a rest and so do I. Muscles I haven't used for ages ache. I manage another round but then for me it's time to stop: but I happily watch the girls dance on, bringing the event alive.

Girls dancing, bringing us all alive.



DANCERS KNOW BODIES to a cellular level. Our minds are nurtured and expanded by new ideas and ways of being, and our souls exchange with audience and fellow dancers with all the profundity we can muster. We research the essence of being. And every now and then we get to meet some young people who live beyond a great divide of experience, but in their essence are just like us.

When my partner was 70 years old I persuaded him to join me at ballroom dance classes. He loved it. It opened the door for him, not just to the pleasure of dancing, but also laughter, a sense of achievement, many new friends and so much more.

Age was no barrier and neither was race.

We all enjoyed what we were doing. He became so popular that I remarked, "it's not just that you dance so well, it is also your rarity value". He agreed, saying he wished he had started to dance years ago.

Dance is for the young and the old. Together or apart. It frees the body and the spirit.

Jenny Goodman

Luke Pell

In amongst these people, places, living, come some things we won't have words for

I AM FOURTEEN years old. I sit on a bench, my back resting against the cool wall. The room is warm with bodies and loud with the chatter of voices, raised to be heard above the jig and lilt of accordion and fiddle. My Dad is talking nearby, passing the time with the minister, while my Mum hands out cups of tea and freshens plates of cakes. Children skid and scurry across the plain, wooden floorboards, squealing with freedom and ignored by the adults. A rising chord tumbles from the instruments, focusing attention.

ANTICIPATION

"Ladies and gentlemen, take your partners for..."

A man stands in front of me. He is broad and square, his face a wrinkle-etched, weather-beaten smile of anticipation. John Eliot, eldest of three brothers of a local farming family. His wife, Gwen, is serving food with my Mum.

"Dance, pet?"

I reach out my hand. His skin is roughened from handling cows, loading hay bales and harvesting wheat. His knuckles have begun to bulge with arthritis, reddened by the Siberian-tinted winds that blast off the North Sea across his farmland. My palm touches his – it is surprisingly soft and warm. Quietly I am thrilled to be asked, as I often am here. I can step out from the ugly duckling tango of school and become a princess for the night. My other hand rests against the coarse tweed of his jacket while his arm is a safety blanket, circling my waist, making it seem tiny. I feel the courteous pressure of his palm on the small of my back. We stand waiting whilst other couples form, his brothers gathering partners – from small, skipping girls to half-blind, rotund, florid-faced Cousin Annie. No one will be left out, if possible. The rise and fall of John's Northumbrian burr vibrates in his chest as he chats to me of this and that. I feel feminine, protected, precious as I look over his wide shoulders at my Mum, continuing her tea-pouring duties.

"Now, folks, are we all ready for... Strip the Willow!"

SENSUALITY

The room bursts with a shimmy of anticipation. John releases me to peel off his jacket and roll up his sleeves. He rubs his hands together



– the warning signal that this will be dizzyingly, nauseatingly fast. I can't wait. We are the top couple which means we will start the never-ending spinning. The musicians rise to their feet, draw breath and off we go. I am burled down the set, passing from male arm to male arm, faster and faster. The laughter of exhilaration is whirled out of me, gurgling from my throat. Images cavort past me in a blurry kaleidoscope. On and on the manly energy lifts me as if I am weightless and passes me down the lines.

Only here am I allowed such masculine attention by my parents, constantly wary of the hormone-laden intentions of my male adolescent peers. In the context of church and community, however, the true gentle men of Northumberland affirm my young womanhood with no hint of predatory sexual intentions. I am safe to experience the thrill of masculinity without the terrifying desires of boys my own age – here there is no need to be responsible for chemistry beyond my control.

As the dance ends John lifts me in a final glittering swoosh, my feet skimming the air. Then, with old-fashioned manners, he returns me, pink-cheeked and breathless with sensuality to my seat.

I dance with my dad. I step on his feet and we dance.

Michael Kliën

Molly Singer-Kingsmith

Laura Cubitt

Dance

We are inscribed with the capacity for original thought and the possibilities to bring about change. We can create and facilitate the conditions for something to happen, for patterning and re-patterning to occur. Doing so is the act of the everyday choreographer – the negotiator, the navigator and architect of fluid ecologies we are all part of. This is the work of the choreographer of the bright everyday and everdark night.



In this dance lies a world full of interaction, relationships, constellations, dependencies, arrangements and ecologies. To enquire into this reality of changing patterns and the forces at play, is to enquire into the choreography of life, examining what makes us dance and why.

I become a mirror

Where audience members choose the parts of themselves they want to see.

There are no boundaries.

Complexity.

Thinking is done outside of my body.

I am listening intensely to the debate.

Music and dance for me, are a few of the things that have magic in them. And they are there for the taking for all of us. They offer a chance to sit in the middle of who we are and then wriggle about and jump a bit. And with other people. Importantly, with other people. Move some atoms. Shift 'em. Celebrate them. Explode a bit. Like the middle of a laugh. Like love. We just have to jump on in and commit, a bit. Without fear of judgment, without consideration of how you're presenting. Truly jump in. It's hard to half dance and half feel, it's hard to half appreciate a wonderful song. It's a lesson in bravery, in purism, commitment without fear, to yourself. To a moment that you put in the world. And how wonderful, what a way to live, in this short life.

But, when words fail, there are dances

Contributors

Amelia Barnes is fifteen, lives in Sandgate, and enjoys the freedom of dancing	Sophie Eustace is a mother to two girls and executive director of Fevered Sleep	Matthew Morris is a performing dance artist collaborating with national and international artists and companies on diverse projects including theatre, film, and live performance
Theresa Beattie is a freelance arts manager	Allegra Galvin is a Senior Policy Advisor for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport	Charlie Morrissey a performance maker, performer and teacher
Synne Behrndt is a dramaturg and teaches at the University of the Arts in Stockholm	Beth Goodchild teaches drama at the Folkestone School for Girls, is the proud mum of two teenage sons, and is passionate about theatre and creative education	Eddie Nixon is Artistic Director of The Place
Rachel Betts is a director and teacher making work with and for children	Jenny Goodman is a singer and vocalist, writer and songwriter with a background in arts management and arts engagement. She is based near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire and has always loved dancing	Luke Pell is a maker and curator based in Scotland, working in and in between the spaces of dance, theatre and live art, and is associate artist with Fevered Sleep
Auriol Bishop is a copywriter, storyteller, and creative director for Hodder Headline	Marie Groucott supports people using yoga to build relationship and self-determination, extending her support to women through birth, at the end of life, and everything in-between	Ben Robinson is a deputy head teacher, working creatively within classrooms, with parents and carers, with local authorities, with colleagues and with Ofsted
Louise Blackwell is an independent producer and lives in Hove with Edie, Lexi and Jesse	David Harradine is co artistic director of Fevered Sleep	Nicola Shaughnessy is Professor of Performance at the University of Kent, teaching and researching in the areas of contemporary performance, applied theatre and arts/science interdisciplinary practices
Alexandra Butler is an artist living and working in Brighton	Kip Johnson is a dancer, mainly working with dance theatre companies in the UK. He is currently trying to find a way of combining his two loves, dancing and nature	Molly Singer-Kingsmith is a dancer and film maker from Brighton
Sam Butler is co artistic director of Fevered Sleep	Sharon Kean is a theatre publicist and part of Kean Lanyon Design and PR	Joyce Smith is a technophobe who still loves dancing, even if it's only watching others perform
Gillian Clark had a long career in arts management before moving into her current career as a counsellor and trainer	Michael Klïen is a leading voice in contemporary choreography. His practice encompasses interdisciplinary thinking, critical writing, curatorial projects, and centrally, choreographic works that are equally at home in the performing as well as the fine arts	Cat Stobbs is one of the Community and Outreach Managers for Salford Community Theatre Project, lives in Manchester and is studying English Literature and Creative Writing with The Open University
Robert Clark is a nature-loving nomad who just bought a house in a city, and an actor (according to Google)	Hannah-Lily Lanyon is a twenty one year old student and activist	Sarah Tutt is currently studying for a Masters in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University
Maddy Costa is resident critic with Chris Goode & Company, a writer for the Guardian and Exeunt, a blogger at Deliq, and co-founder of Dialogue and Something Other, two organisations dedicated to rethinking the critical conversation around theatre and live art	Anna Leonie is a dance graduate born in Manchester and now living and working in South East London	Catriona Wright is a film programmer and arts administrator also with a background in filmmaking and film production
Laura Cubitt is a performer and theatre maker	Ruth Little is a dramaturg, a writer, and a daughter	
Andy Dawson is manager, County Youth Arts, Nottinghamshire, and works mainly with young people to develop music, dance and media projects	Catherine Love is a freelance arts journalist and theatre critic	
Robin Dingemans is a choreographer and performer originally from New Zealand who now works predominantly in the UK and Sweden	Christopher McBrien is a retired further education college lecturer in maths who spends his time supporting his grown up children and pursuing interests he never had time for when in full time work	<i>Thanks to all the contributors whose names do not appear.</i>

A retelling

A hope

An aspiration

Men & Girls Dance

The Forum, 28 Duke Street
Barrow-in-Furness LA14 1HH

theforumbarrow.co.uk
01229 820000

Saturday 13th April – Sunday 14th April 2024

Fevered Sleep was established in 1996 by artistic directors Sam Butler and David Harradine. All our work is made in collaboration with people outside the company, and participation is at the heart of everything we do. Our projects have appeared across the UK and internationally with theatres, galleries and festivals such as Leeds 2023, The Young Vic, Sadler's Wells, Tate Britain, The Whitworth and Sydney Opera House. Sometimes we turn up in other places where people work, learn and live, most recently at Clifton Green Primary School in York, St George's Shopping Centre in Preston and Roundhay Park in Leeds.

We're trying to make the world a more caring, curious, compassionate place, one unlikely art project at a time.

What do you think?

We want to hear more about what people think of *Men & Girls Dance*. You don't have to have seen the performance to be part of the discussion.

Please feel free to share any thoughts you have on this newspaper, the project overall or the subject it's covering. We really want to hear from you and carry on the conversation. Please email us, connect on Facebook, Instagram or X, or write to us with anything that comes to mind.

admin@feveredsleep.co.uk

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If you'd like to call us, our number is
020 3815 6430

In Barrow *Men & Girls Dance* is performed by

Isabelle Andrews
Mikel Aristegui
Poppy Bamber
Luisa Birch
Robert Clark
Bel Fox
Kip Johnson
Faye Keane
Yadah Julia Oppong Kwarteng
Echo Marsden
Neisha Nicholl
Bakani Pick-Up
Akshay Sharma
Brodi Wilson

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Sara Cowman
Company Stage Manager
Sam Evans
Production Manager
David Harradine
Director, Design, Sound Design
Jamie McCarthy
Composer
Anushka Samarasinghe
Chaperone
Hansjörg Schmidt
Lighting Designer

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Programme Director
Sam Butler
Co Artistic Director
David Harradine
Co Artistic Director
Dimitry Nicholls
Executive Director
Uzo Onyejiaka
Communications Coordinator
Annabelle Sami
Producer
Marina Wu
General Manager

A project by Fevered Sleep
Produced in association with Fuel

More information on *Men & Girls Dance* and the people who have helped make it can be found online at feveredsleep.co.uk/project/men-and-girls-dance

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We're a registered charity and anything you give will help us produce more projects like *Men & Girls Dance* in the future. Thank you.