

**DANCECITY** ©  
DANCE FOR THE NORTH EAST



**Telling stories through movement**

Annual Review 2020-21

# FOREWORD FROM OUR CHAIR

## Sharon Paterson Chair, Dance City Board of Trustees



In my foreword for our annual report last year, I wrote that although we wanted to celebrate our achievements for 2019/20, we knew that 20-21 would inevitably look very different. We did not know at that point that COVID 19 would still be with us nor did we have a clear understanding of the impact of the pandemic on the communities that we are part of and serve.

Despite the challenges, Dance City has continued to champion the value of dance and creativity. We have found new and different ways of working to make sure that we continue to deliver our mission to lead and support a thriving Dance ecology in the north east. We have embraced change, become adept at integrating digital technologies and worked hard to ensure that we have meaningful and relevant connections with our communities, our audiences, our students and the dance artists who work with us. Never before has the world so greatly needed creativity, imagination, invention and the sheer joy and optimism that dance offers.

Like many sector organisations, we were vulnerable to the financial implications caused by the pause in performances, classes and other activities.

We are extremely grateful to the DCMS for the Cultural Recovery Fund award that supported us to keep doing what we do best. I would like to pay tribute to the hard work, dedication and commitment of every member of the Dance City Team, without whom none of this would be possible. They are an extraordinary group of people and it is a real privilege to work with them.



# WELCOME

## Introduction by Anand Bhatt, Artistic Director & CEO



As I look at Dance City in 20-21, a year that was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, I am reminded that at the centre of all artistic institutions are people. The people who work with us and the people who we serve. The tremendous resolve of our staff and freelancers at Dance City has been a cornerstone. It was a challenging year, yo-yoing between physical spaces and digital spaces, whilst home schooling, shopping for relatives who could not leave home and of course many people becoming sick themselves. And sadly, for many of us, mourning the loss of loved ones. But each time, I saw undiminished passion. A steadfast commitment that dance was inside of us, and we should keep on dancing. Our audiences, participants and students kept helping us to believe.

Dance City transformed itself almost immediately to digital services after the very first lockdown in March 2020. Our Higher Education programmes and Centre for Advanced Training continued their training. With investment in new hardware and some great staff who spearheaded development in this area, we were able to develop video and streaming learning material. As we gained confidence, a number of public

classes went online, with hundreds of people taking part in dozens of classes every week. Our Community Engagement team were amongst Dance City's top innovators. With initiatives such as Dancing on your Doorstep, the team set out to go into neighbourhoods and get people to move whilst standing at their front door – picked up by televised news no less.

It was a challenging time for dance artists. Theatres needing to close their doors meant shows were cancelled. Dance City's Artist Development team continued its investment in independent projects.

Many performances cancelled in 20-21 are being realised in our 21-22 season. Artists made new discoveries, found new collaborators and new audiences online. Our investment in digital commissions could well become one of the legacies. We were very grateful to receive financial support from DCMS' Culture Recovery Fund, which supported Dance City through a period when our physical doors were shut for much of the year.

The year represented a seismic shift in other ways too. Some important conversations were advanced

around inclusivity, environmental sustainability and serving better the communities across our wonderful region. As we rebuild our programmes and welcome participants and audiences, we hope to be a more responsive organisation, ensuring that great quality dance experiences is available to more people and responsibly.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank:

Our wonderful staff who persisted through so much to serve our communities.

Our board of trustees who stepped up and up as the time demanded.

Our funding partners for offering resources at this time enabling dance activity across the north east.

Our individual donors for trusting us and making dance happen for others.

**We believe** in the power of dance to invigorate people and communities, and for dance to hold a special place in people's hearts.



Our mission is to ensure the north east is the best place to dance and experience dance.

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## **Dance City is the biggest dancehouse in the north of England**

We are responsible for dance development in the whole of the north east region, with a population of 2.5 million.

## **We are a CATALYST, CONVENER and CREATOR**

of excellent dance and movement experiences from the north east, for the north east and the world.







# A theatre dedicated to dance

Dance City has an intimate, 240 seat theatre dedicated to showcasing dance performances from the north east, the UK and across the globe. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our theatre closed in March 2020 along with thousands of others across the UK and the globe, and we embarked on our longest 'interval' since we opened our doors in 2005. This was following the most successful year ever for our professional dance programme in 2019-20.

## We innovated

Although we had to cancel or postpone all in-person performances during the financial year 2020-21, we did create opportunities for dance audiences to experience work digitally. In August 2020 we presented a digital performance of our MA Company, The Collective. The piece, The Solo Collective was highly influenced by the COVID pandemic, fusing a collection of socially distanced solos exploring themes of identity, society and media within the unprecedented circumstances we found ourselves in.

In December 2020 we presented our annual Dance Edits platform as a livestream event for viewers at home, with a small in-person audience of industry guests. Seven artists and companies based in the north east of England performed new work in the Dance City theatre under strict COVID-secure guidelines, watched live by 104 households from across the world.

## We commemorated

On 23 March 2021, we marked twelve months since the first UK lockdown with TWELVE. Twelve artists performed over twelve hours in our theatre, with a ticketed livestream feed where all donated proceeds were put towards a new dance commission, with match funding from the Community Foundation. We also went live on Instagram each hour. It was an emotional and rewarding day, dedicated to remembering those who had lost their lives through COVID, as well as the loss of cultural life for artists and audiences during the year of lockdown.



## Theatre headlines 2020-21

**81** households and **689** livestream viewers for TWELVE

**£2,522** raised for a new artist commission with  
**62** crowdfunding supporters as a result of TWELVE

**104** households watched the livestream performance  
of Dance Edits

# Public classes & workshops: Dance for EVERY body

The impact of COVID was a 91% reduction in income from classes and workshops in 2020-21, compared to the previous year. Our public classes programme has been one of the biggest success stories for Dance City over the years, and pre-COVID we were offering 113 classes per week and generating over £260K of income per year.



## We looked to the future

In May 2020 we conducted a survey with our class attenders, asking them what they thought about the future of public dance classes. We received positive feedback on plans to introduce online classes, and invested in broadcast quality AV equipment which enabled us to offer high quality digital classes from August 2020 onwards.

We developed a two-year Classes Recovery Plan which sets out our approach to building back to pre-COVID levels of operation and income. We also looked forward to integrating a digital programme of dance teaching into our business model.

## We pivoted for success

With the investment in kit and training came the ability for us to take an agile approach to delivery of dance classes. When government guidelines allowed, we invited audiences to 'BE IN THE ROOM OR ON ZOOM', with a new hybrid model.

Within strict COVID guidelines we welcomed the public back into our building from September 2020. We were one of the only cultural sector organisation in the region to offer in-person activities and our audience let us know their appreciation with an average 88% in-person attendance and many classes sold out months in advance.



## Class headlines 2020-21

**833** public class sessions

**531** digital class sessions

**302** in-person sessions

**6083** attendances in total

**64%** attendees were digital

## Digital Class Feedback

" I love having the option to do classes at home and look forward to it each week."

" Having the Zoom option is great for myself as I am a shift worker so it means I'm more likely to be able to take part from home as I don't have to travel. Plus having a chronic illness means I sometimes struggle to get out and take part in activities so having the option to do it from home has made a huge difference for me."

" Adult dance classes where I live are non existent. I can do my class and save the planet by staying at home with the car in my drive."

" I absolutely love having this opportunity to join Dance City classes, which just wouldn't be possible for me to attend in person. The price is really good and I hope to attend many more classes."

## In-person Class Feedback

" An excellent experience overall. Lovely staff making everyone feel welcome whether it was your first class or you 100th!!"

" My daughter had a wonderful time and came out with nothing but praise."

" I didn't feel judged and felt very able and supported."

" My mother really enjoys her time at the classes and this is her 2nd year of doing so. She has made friends with people, the staff are "lovely " she says."

" We're new to dancing but felt very welcome and supported by the teacher. The lessons are great fun."



# Dance careers start here

Dance City Training Academy offers specialist dance training for gifted and talented young people from the age of 10 through our Centre for Advanced Dance Training (CAT), BA (Hons) Professional Dance and the MA Advanced Dance Performance.

## Centre for Advanced Training (CAT)

Dance City's CAT is part of the Department for Education's Music and Dance Scheme offering dance training for young people. Affordability is not a barrier to taking part and we offer means-tested grants which can fund up to 100% of tuition fees.

## We adapted

The CAT team is very proud that throughout the pandemic we were able to continue provision in both a digital and in person format, exploring new ways of delivery and participation.

We adapted the curriculum to provide Zoom classes allowing students to participate in weekly ballet, contemporary and creative sessions. We also enhanced the pastoral care to provide students with emotional support and guidance.

Dance City collaborated with our National CAT partners to foster best practice during the year whilst working together to navigate the evolving landscape. We also collectively delivered a graduate workshop experience with New Adventures to take virtual class with a company dancer and have a Q&A with Matthew Bourne.

## Training Academy Headlines 2020-21

**116** CAT students

**65%** of students in receipt of means tested DfE funding to cover all or part of CAT Tuition Fees

**33** BA (Hons) Professional Dance students

**14** MA Advanced Dance Performance students

**100% pass rate** for MA and BA graduates

## **BA (Hons) Professional Dance**

## **MA Advanced Dance Performance**

Dance City's Higher Education provision weathered the pandemic storm with aplomb. Staff and students alike adapted to pandemic conditions, with students learning to work in digital and hybrid scenarios.

Recruiting 15 students into the BA in 2020, despite wider dance HE turbulence nationwide, grew our BA cohort to 33, with 14 students to the MA, including many from the EU.

## **We worked with industry professionals**

BA students work with renowned industry professionals to develop their understandings and practices of dance, choreography, teaching and facilitation, research, and management, including guest choreographers Ben Wright, Peter Groom and Caroline Reece drawn from national and international circuits.

Our MA is conceived as a touring company, The Collective; last year students performed work by in-house Associate Artist David Lloyd as well as creating film work independently and undertaking periods of work with Gecko and Ben Duke/Lost Dog. Further touring plans were postponed due to pandemic closures, but students were encouraged to ensure their work met the public.

## **Successful partnerships**

We continue to work in close partnership with the University of Sunderland; the relationship is developing positively, and indeed each year of the MA has included graduates from Sunderland's Performing Arts programme.





# Dance careers thrive here

Public subsidy and surplus commercial income allow us to be at the heart of the art, supporting dancers to live their creative careers. The COVID pandemic had huge impacts on our professional artist programme of support and development. However, we were able to offer our building and facilities for use by professional artists wherever possible.

Pro Space continued to be in high demand with 641 hours of free studio space being taken up in October and November 2020 by 30 different Professional Artists.

Pro Lates (a pilot initiative to enable more flexible access to professional space) took place October – November 2020 with 17 artists using over 105 hours of space over eight nights to train, rehearse or create late on Thursday evenings.

We continued to adapt our most inclusive process to date for commissions. Across the three commission strands we continued to prioritise support for artists who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic/People Of Colour, Disabled and mature (10 years plus of professional practice).

## We continued to commission artists

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation: Developing Dance Audiences in the north east. We continued to work with eight partner venues across the north east to increase dance programming and audience development across the region.

We launched an open call for a north east artist to respond to a £25,000 commission for new work with a guaranteed tour across The Witham, Barnard Castle, Darlington Hippodrome, Middlesbrough Town Hall, Hartlepool Town Hall Theatre, Queens Hall Hexham, Alnwick Playhouse, Gosforth Civic Theatre, Fire Station Sunderland and Dance City.

BLM and Artist of Colour conversations continue both internally and externally and will inform our artistic and organisational thinking and policies moving forward.

In partnership with NGCV, Dance City commissioned Tiny Dances to create a short, digital dance work which was co-ordinated and shared online during lockdown. Media views: Facebook and Instagram - 11,944 Twitter - 11,365

We partnered for the first time with Nexus to offer two new £4,000, small site specific commissions for North East Dance Artists as part of the Metro's 40th Anniversary.

Pictured: Robby Graham of Southpaw Dance Company with Dance City's MA cohort who performed REACH at Metro stations across the network.



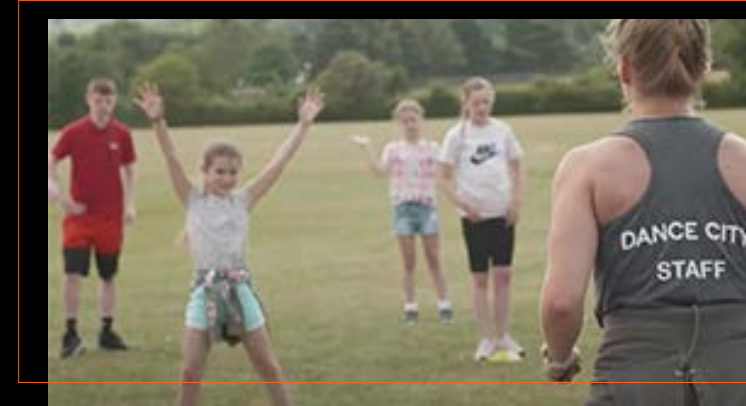




# Communities dance with us

Dance City is not a building, Dance City has a building.

The Dance City Engagement team returned from furlough in the summer of 2020 with a mission to 'get people moving' after the first UK-wide lockdown. The team took dance into the heart of communities by physically dancing with groups outdoors, in parks, outside village halls and into people's homes and settings via zoom and film.



## We were 'Dancing in the Street' with Dance City...

**In partnership with PlayInNewcastle and Street Games, we delivered free dance workshops to 55 young people in various locations across Newcastle. These hour-long 'Dancing in the Street' classes were held weekly over the period of Newcastle and Gateshead's 2020 'Summer of Change'. We also partnered with Northern Stage to deliver sessions outdoors in Byker.**

We hosted a competition to encourage neighbours and get them 'Dancing near your doorstep'.

## We welcomed people back into the building...

We hosted summer schools during the final week of the holidays in August 2020 with different themes each day and worked hard to support young people returning to our building.

## We Zoomed...

We delivered weekly zoom classes across summer 2020 to support the classes activity and even had an additional member of the team delivering with us. Maya Kumar (aged 4) team taught with her mum Helen to deliver 'Mini Movers' classes.

We delivered weekly online dance sessions with 'Unforgettable Experiences' to support older people and their families with dementia. Building a range of transferable skills using taught sequences and creative tasks with the mission to increase confidence in dance for the participants to improve health and wellbeing.

The team dressed as Elves and hosted a Dance City Christmas family disco – bringing the party into people's homes with fun Christmas dances and games.

In partnership with Titan travel and Active Newcastle we hosted zoom classes in different styles of dance to retain customers, to improve wellbeing for staff members and to celebrate International Women's day.



## We went back into schools...

We created a new package for schools 'Make your Move' and an accompanying film to communicate one clear message and offer to schools. We created a series of 10 dance sessions on film and shared with schools for free to keep them moving too!

## We planned for the future...

We received funding support from Community Foundation to expand our work with older people and 'keep people moving'. Planning for our first Inspire Festival for dancers 55+ was underway. We connected with exciting new partners and organisations including People Dancing for the project Live Well and Dance with Parkinson's.

## Engagement Headlines 2020-21

**60** UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES for older people in care homes

**152** BEST SUMMER EVER ENGAGEMENTS with children during lockdown

**108** SUMMER MOVES on Zoom

**2,611** MAKE YOUR MOVE video school engagements

**520** face to face engagements through dance during lockdown

We danced with ages **0 to 83!**

## Feedback from community engagement projects:

" They took part in the first session and they really seemed to really take to it. They enjoyed it and took it away from the sessions and into their family homes."

*Youth Worker*

" It's been a great partnership and really good for the kids to be dancing together outside."

*Youth worker*

" I wanted to write to thank you for working with us on our pilot project... our participants have had a really wonderful time and it is pleasing that we managed to deliver something effective and engaging in spite of the various challenges we have faced."

*Partner organisation*

" You got to have a lot of fun doing it. It didn't really matter if you got it wrong or if you got it right because you were still doing it your way."

*Participant aged 8*



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