

SAGEDANCECOMPANY

NEWSLETTER – SPRING 2016

Spring has certainly sprung for the Sage Dance Company. All the hard work that we put in over the last six months has finally started to pay off. In an effort to build our repertoire we have been attending extra rehearsals and working both with Simon Rice, our Director and Choreographer and former First Soloist with the Royal Ballet, and Fionuala Power, our guest choreographer. The result has been a reworking of Fionuala's Merce Cunningham-inspired piece "Chase", and a series of new short works by Simon to the music of Telemann entitled "Pieces of Eight".

Both works were performed at the OSO Arts Centre in Barnes, south-west London, on March 10th and formed part of a very enjoyable "Evening of Dance and Prose". The OSO is a beautiful and intimate venue in the heart of Barnes village and was perfectly suited to the mixed programme of dance, words and music. Some Sage members not only danced but displayed their other talents: Olivia Lousada made her first venture into choreography, and Bren Gosling, who is also an author, wrote all the prose pieces, one of which was performed superbly by Jean Woollard. Contributions from the extraordinary "Ready Willing Able" dance duo of Tom Clark and Jill Grote, from the actor Peter Kenny and the musician Alice Williamson made for a rich and varied programme. Friends and family who had turned out to support us were genuinely surprised at how moving and memorable the evening had been. As a result we are planning to repeat the event at the OSO on June 28th, but with a slightly changed programme, so do come along. We performed again two days later on March 12th at the Richdance festival, Richmond Borough's annual platform for new dance. We have performed at the last three festivals and were delighted to be asked again as this is a great opportunity for dancers of all ages to come together, share their skills and enjoy a wide range of dance styles – Bollywood, flamenco, disco, street dance, contemporary, classical, you name it, it was all there. We performed two of our Pieces of Eight, which are a joy to dance. The beautiful music of Telemann which binds the pieces together ranges from the slow and contemplative to the fast and furious. One moment we are almost imperceptibly moving in slow motion and the next we are joyously leaping across the stage. Again we seemed to surprise our audience by attempting something that older dancers just don't do and got a big round of applause for it.

In advocating a wider interpretation of what the older dancer is capable of and always striving to improve our own performance capabilities, we are obviously setting ourselves some ambitious goals. We were therefore very pleased to be invited to the "Elixir Creative Dance Day" hosted by Sadler's Wells on March 18/19. The aim was to bring together the older dancers, teachers and choreographers who had taken part in the Elixir Festival of 2014 and help them develop their performance potential, as well as plan for the next Festival to celebrate older people's dance in June 2017. A series of creative workshops encouraged us to widen our dance horizons, draw on our rich life experience and extend our movement vocabulary. We were then given the opportunity to share a work in progress and get feedback on how we might develop it further for performance. It was a very useful day but some of us felt that the feedback could have been more constructively critical. The general feeling was that older dancers are still being cut the wrong kind of slack because we are getting on in years.

Most of the members of Sage have not been professional dancers, although there are two of us who have been professionally trained and a number who had ballet or stage training as young people. So

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we were both surprised and intrigued to be approached by a Radio 4 producer to be part of her documentary “A Dancer Dies Twice”, about what happens to dancers when their careers come to a premature end. As an amateur company we struggle with how we can continue to create work of quality when our bodies and minds are ageing, but how much more difficult must it be for professional dancers whose careers might be over in their late 30’s – or even 20s, if due to injury? What are the physical and psychological effects of having to stop dancing? That’s where we came in. Three Sage members were interviewed for the programme, Olivia, Gilly and Zelide, and made a strong case for continuing to explore what dance can and does mean as we age. The programme evoked some strong feelings judging by the number of people who got in touch with us after the broadcast on April 4th. One comment in particular was very moving:

“Hello, I have just listened to 'A Dancer Dies Twice' aired on Radio 4. I ended up in tears and have also realised how much I miss dance. I am an ex- Royal Ballet School pupil and Festival Ballet dancer but had to give up through injury. But the programme just brought home to me how much dance is still part of me and my body. So I found your website and just wanted to say how wonderful I think the company is and how I wish I could find something like this in my area. So well done and if I ever get the chance will try to come and see you. Thank you.”

There were some other statements in the programme that we felt really captured the essence of dance for older people. One was from our own Zelide about shedding your self-consciousness as you become older, enabling your inner self to emerge. The other was from the American principal dancer Wendy Whelan of the New York City Ballet, who talked about how you can at last gain ownership of your own special quality, of your particular style of movement, of your body. Marvellous stuff!

With comments like this we know we have a long way to go but are on a path worth taking. Plans for the rest of the year include two performances at some larger venues in central London and some choreographic workshops run by Simon – his aim is to have two new works choreographed by Sage members ready for early next year – and a second work created by Fionuala Power, a former dancer with Merce Cunningham and the Royal Ballet. So do join us by following us online, coming to one of our performances or auditioning to dance with us. We need your support and your constructive but critical feedback!

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