

## NEWSLETTER - AUTUMN/WINTER 2025

### THE RYTHYM OF LIFE

Sage is now in its 15th year and some of us have been dancing together for much of that time. As we get older, we are bound to ask each other how long we can continue to age gracefully, to enjoy our dancing, and to give the kind of performances that people will want to come and see. Quite a while it seems if this wonderful clip from the Pina Bausch website is anything to go by! It concerns Aida Rodriguez, who has just been awarded a Pina Bausch Fellowship in her 90th year. Here is an extract from her application:

*"Aida Rodríguez (Tata) is an artist, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and activist. Born in 1932 in Cunaviche, Venezuela, she became a dancer at the age of 88. For her, dance is a way to express emotion and connect with the environment around her. Through authentic movement and contact improvisation, she loses all sense of time, merging past, present and future into a single living moment. If she can dance, anything is possible."*



*During this fellowship she will collaborate with her grandson Miguel Alejandro Castillo – a dancer and choreographer – exploring authentic movement, contact improvisation, writing, and prayer. This opportunity will allow Aida to deepen her understanding of ageing, impermanence, and the cycles of life. She seeks to study the language of nature through her body, seeking a deeper connection to the rhythms of the earth, the wisdom of the trees, and the quiet inevitable passage of time."*

The website extract also included the Jury Statement:

*"We were happily reminded of the fact that dance is not an elite practice reserved for a certain type of body, or to a certain age bracket - Aida's application was one of the most refreshing fellowship applications. Daring, dreaming and rooted in a real purpose of what dance is and why we must dance. A gentle reminder of other daring dance projects, including notably Pina Bausch's legacy in productions such as 'Kontakthof', and its upcoming remake 'Kontakthof - Echoes of '78', with elder bodies taking centerstage. Dance is this mystical human phenomenon that we do when we are old, we do when we are young, and we do when we are first born and instinctively, responding to rhythm and movement."*

Aida's Fellowship is an amazing achievement and a powerful reminder of the part dance can and should play in our lives from beginning to end.

### An action-packed year

We have had an excellent year and all five pieces mentioned as works in progress in our last newsletter came to fruition and were performed in a variety of venues.

Our **Life Lines** show in collaboration with the talented Rack Press poets enabled us to showcase three new works for the Bloomsbury Festival in October 2024.



The programme included Kim Mendez's colourful **Rainbow** danced not to music but to seven poems by Michèle Roberts, and we are very grateful to Nicholas Minns who joined to perform with us.

Marie Forbes' groovy **Head to Shoe Blues** was followed by **Reel Joy**, Sarah Miller's fantastic Irish reel, which went down a storm and made the audience want to join in too.



Jennifer Jackson's **Samara**, an elegiac retelling of the Sycamore Gap Tree story with specially commissioned poems by Nicholas Murray, attracted much attention when we performed this for the *Critical Moment* evening of dance choreography at The Place in November.

The year was ended with rousing performances at Ellen Bunting's Christmas show in Kent.



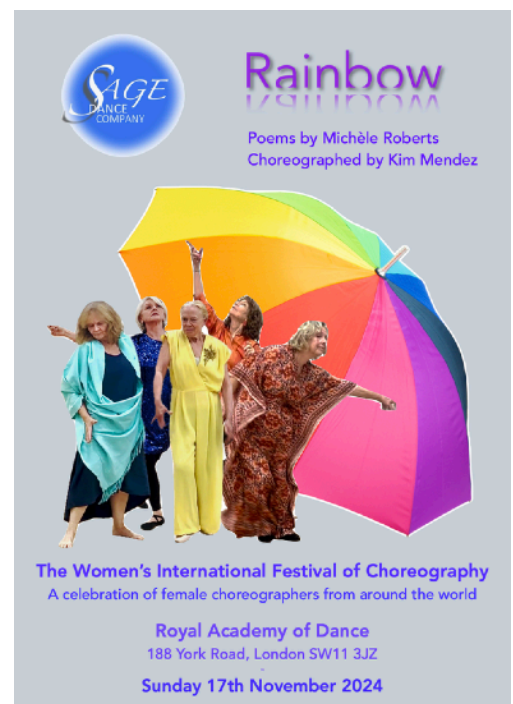
**2025** has also got off to a good start. We performed Kelly Craige's wonderfully professional take on **All That Jazz** at The Posh Club in Hackney in March. We really got into character and embraced the style. Posh Club audiences are always very lively and appreciative so much fun was had by all.



Other opportunities during the year included a repeat performance of **Head to Shoe Blues** at the Dance West Festival in June.



We were invited to perform Kim Mendez's **Rainbow** for The Women's International Festival of Choreography at the Royal Academy of Dance



In May we joined creative forces with *Synthaesis*, a company formed by composer Lawrence Ball and visual artist Michael Tusch to explore a deeper connection between music, colour and form. **Mirrors/Reflections** is an improvised piece in which dancers dialogue with their own coloured shadows, and first performed for the Planet Tree Music Festival.

## New year, new challenges

While we have enjoyed these opportunities immensely, five new pieces in one year is a lot for a self-running community company of older dancers. It has led us to take stock and ask the question "How much is enough?". We are all in no doubt that what we most enjoy about being in Sage is the creativity involved in working with different choreographers, the experience of learning together, the sheer joy of dancing and the mental and physical benefits it brings. We certainly want to continue as long as we can and we are lucky to be working with choreographers who are exploring with us what dancing means at this stage in our lives.

After 15 years we have quite an extensive repertoire and this year we intend to reprise some old pieces as well as learn new works. We are fortunate to have **Jennifer Jackson** and **Fionuala Power** back with us to refresh their lovely pieces, and working again with **Sarah Miller, Marie Forbes and Kelly Craige** to create new pieces very different in tone and texture to their last works. In the coming year we will be trying to find the right balance between old and new and coming up with a programme that stretches but does not overburden us.

As Aida's wonderful fellowship application puts it, dance offers us the opportunity to understand the ageing process and the cycles of life. We were born to dance and our response to rhythm and movement never leaves us if we nurture and develop it. We look forward, as always, to a year of new possibilities.

Barbara Berkeley-Hill



Rainbow by Kim Mendez photos © Chris Daw