



Diaspora by promoting and celebrating a positive, engaging and exciting image of regular practice, performances, projects and training ensuring excellence thrives in this region.

- Use our unique capabilities, perspectives, contacts and experiences to develop opportunities for high quality and effective international cultural exchange projects. Develop links between diverse artists from different communities at all levels of experience and offer support and advice through training, mentoring, practice and examples of clear progression routes.
- Provide CPD at an appropriate level for artists to ensure that the high quality of APD teaching in the region is sustained
- Work towards breaking the cycle of stereotyped thinking by offering opportunities to watch and take part in performances, projects and events that promote a positive image of African and Caribbean culture
- Encourage people of all ages and abilities learning about other cultures aiming to develop well-rounded individuals, who are open to new ideas
- Enable people to become better equipped to participate in a global arts economy and society by highlighting local and global issues in our education and participation strands included in APD projects.
- Develop our International Dance Day programme to enable increased promotion of professional and community engagement in APD encouraging participation and cultural diversity.
- Enrich APD education in our schools by providing access to different forms of dance from across the African Diaspora through major RISE projects and events that enables people of the Diaspora to respect understand and identify with their own

annual programme.

Wish us luck!

Karen Gallagher, Maxine Brown and Rachel Rogers:
www.mdi.org.uk

Bristol

Independent producer, project manager and writer, Katy Noakes shares her thoughts on dance of the African diaspora in Bristol. Interviewer: 'Funmi Adewole

What led you to work with artists working in the Dance of the African diaspora and how would you describe that journey?

During the eighties and nineties I lived and worked in St Pauls. It was a time of real vibrancy and progress in the community. The riots had paved the way for change, and although things generally were very polarised there was a real sense of pride and new possibilities. I had been working at Kuumba Afrikan Caribbean Arts and community resource (formerly Inkworks), originally in marketing but also on the Carnival education programme and then taking on development of a dance programme. This was the era of a thriving black arts touring circuit; artists were empowered, ambitious and constantly pushing the boundaries of the form. It was impossible not to be inspired by that sense of movement and purpose.

The ways that I work with artists has changed as the

sector has changed. Whereas the 80s and 90s saw strong allegiances between arts and community empowerment and much more practice at access levels, the focus of recent times is more on individual professional, artistic development. The Participatory arts practice now favoured doesn't necessarily have the same agendas and outcomes as community arts.

After Kuumba, I moved to Dance Bristol and then the City Council and see it as a period when the arts really professionalised; more accreditation came online and specialisms around arts, health and regeneration began to develop.

That provided some great opportunities but with less subsidised access to training and increasing pressure on artists to invest in their own development, the pool of artists began to decline. For some, those kind of 'social function' arts opportunities became a glass ceiling, providing satisfying and challenging work but also defining them as artists whose ability to deliver work around health and equalities agendas was valued over their own artistry.

What's interesting now is that a lot of artists who had focused on making work for touring are now re-visiting some of those original values around engagement; the project and performance models may be framed differently but essentially it's about the recognition that we need to keep reaching out to make new audiences.

In your article entitled 'Bristol's African dance tradition' (Dance UK news Issue 58, Autumn 2005) you spoke about a number of dance companies and artists who worked in schools, dance at corporate events and in the community who were relatively unknown to the arts funding system. You mentioned - Issa Sawane, Rosemon Asare, Ripton. Can you give us an update on this area of practice?

Some of those artists are no longer active in dance. Many of the opportunities that used to exist in community and education settings have dried up.

Those pathways used to provide a testing ground for many emerging and fledgling practitioners and it fed a constant flow of new artists. It's a meaner, tighter system now and without support to navigate procurement and accreditation schemes and less formal opportunities to take risks and explore, artists are expected to clearly articulate their vision and strategy much earlier in their careers.

There are positives in this schism though. Although there is less independent, neighbourhood level practice than there used to be, the practice that does exist has sustained itself without regular funding. For example, DMAC studios was built around ten years ago by two artists, Rubba and Remi Tawose, and still offers regular class and masterclass programmes and a physical home for DAD dance. They have achieved that on their own terms and that's something to celebrate.

Bristol also has a thriving afro-latin dance scene with classes and clubnights that operate independently of 'the sector' in the social dance world. Artists like Helen Wilson of Rise YDC and Penny Caffrey of Movema are active in connecting these genres to the wider dance world and have independently programmed some hugely popular mash up days of masterclasses from visiting artists.

In the same article you spoke about street dancers who straddled both the commercial world and subsidized professional scene such The Floor Technicians and Funk It up, Hype crew and Fresh dance. Can you also tell us how things have developed with these artists or artists who work in this way?

Hype celebrated their tenth anniversary last year and are still going from strength to strength, Funk It Up still work in schools, Fresh's AD Charleen Downer took time out to become a mum but has recently begun working with a new influx of younger members, and Floor Technicians officially retired from performance last year after Oscar Anderson suffered a serious injury.

We've been blessed by a young generation of talented and committed hip hop artists from Bristol; Jodelle Douglas, Frankie Johnson, Kieran Warner and Deepraj Singh. I first met Frankie and Deepraj age 11 when they joined Kuumba's boys' dance project and can still remember the impact on them when they saw Benji Reid performing. It's great that young dancers can still access those kind of opportunities through Swindon Dance's C.A.T programme and through Rise YDC's regular 'go sees'.

Frankie is dancing with Plague, toured with Boy Blue and is wiping the worldwide battle floors in house dance. Jodelle reached the finals of BBC Young Dancer Hip Hop category and is working with Jukebox in Cardiff whilst popping up on billboards as the face of Topshop, Kieran is currently in his final year at Circus Space whilst still regularly teaching, competing and hosting Battle Royale events and Deepraj has just graduated from The Place. I'm excited to see how they all develop; today's dancers have to be a lot more agile career wise and they each have such a strong portfolio of skills that there are myriad ways they could go.

Bristol has had a legacy of community organisations and projects that have now gone – Salongo, African Caribbean Arts Forum, Black Pyramid Film Project, Kuumba, St Paul Carnival. What do you think can fill the gap? What kind of structures could be useful?

Everything has it's time. The loss of Black led arts organisations here has been conflated by cuts in the black voluntary sector so those that survived, such as St Pauls Carnival, became a conduit for many community needs and frustrations that it just didn't have the remit or capacity to take on. Funders have ring-fenced Carnival funds though, so individuals and organisations are talking about what carnival may be going forward.

Members of Black Pyramid are happily still active. Founders Ian Sergeant and Femi Kolade are busy doing great things in Birmingham and London while Rob Mitchell and Shawn Sobers run Frist Barn

Creatives film company.

The politics of community leadership have sometimes played out detrimentally in the city's Black arts scene. There has been a false dichotomy between artistic excellence and community development that has muddled progress and looked to the past too often for solutions to new problems and new demographics. Changing demographics and the loss of locality working in arts has also impacted. The geographical focus will symbolically always be St Pauls but practice is much more peripatetic.

Many artists identify differently now than they did in the era of ACE 'Decibel' initiatives; there's greater fluidity not just between cultural identities but also techniques, genres and forms and beyond shaping strategy, labels are increasingly redundant to artists. There's still a risk to events that promote as Black arts that they are perceived as a cultural rather than artistic activity and miss out on wider attention.

The challenge today is when artists operate in separate silos, not seeing the predominantly contemporary identified arts sector as having a place for them. Although we're in the era of the individual artist, partnership working is virtually mandatory, and artists have to seek support from a number of organisations to get work off the ground. That's an area that still needs more open dialogue and support. Some of the city centre venues actively reach out and have built genuine relationships, but there's still some distance to go for dancers who practice traditional forms to find the right models to connect them to contemporary arts venues.

Without a cash and resource injection in the city, the future in Bristol is likely to be a jigsaw of consortia allegiances, temporary interventions and shared initiatives. As well as Circamedia, Trinity Arts are also proving a great venue for dance; partnering ADAD to host Adesola Akinleye's Light Steps performance for local early years settings last year and bringing the full performance back for this spring, while also agreeing to book Uchenna Dance's 'Our Mighty

Groove' in Autumn. That's a show I've been trying to bring to Bristol for a while now and I'm pretty damn excited.

We do have some great, receptive venues, good audiences for dance and a thriving, diverse annual Dance Village programme at Bristol Harbour Festival. Many of us feel we need an organisation with a dedicated dance development remit to really make long term impact and fundamentally, we share the same national need to be represented on curriculums to ensure D.A.D. dance is part of everyone's vocabulary and not seen as another, separate world. Bristol dance artists have necessarily become experts at self sufficiency and finding ways of getting things done despite the lack of infrastructure here. That's to their credit and is completely understandable, but when artists become so used to working alone it can become hard to pull people together on a longer, shared journey.

You have recently been working with ADAD can you describe the role and what insights it has given you into this sector and what is unique about dance of the African Diaspora in Bristol?

One of the noticeable differences is the direction of ambitions between the region and London. In Bristol we have a lively African dance scene at practitioner and class level, but few artists devising for performance.

Last year ADAD held a discussion event with Strike A Light Festival in Gloucester to explore the different ambitions between London and the South West. What came through really clearly from SW artists was their commitment to working with their local communities.

In a lot of ways, the hip hop scene and its ethos now serve the same functions here as African dance did at it's peak. The sense of family; honouring of history and authentic tradition, and commitment to legacy through 'each one teach one', all reflect similar values and help to connect people on a deeper

level.

What do you think the future holds?

Without sustained support and safety nets it can hard for artists to think big and plan ambitious work, but Bristol does have the skills base for some far reaching work – for example, with more artists trained as Arts Awards Advisors the city could lead on regional DAD schools' programmes; we could work with our veteran artists to develop culturally specific reminiscence work with elders, or collaborate with other art forms to produce unique immersive performance experiences.

Considering where Bristol is based in the heartland of summer festivals, it would be great to see more site adaptive work made specifically for outdoors. Circus and street theatre are both strong here and offer great scope for collaboration, as does the city's digital arts scene. We have some incredible writers, film-makers and musicians, so there's fantastic potential for more collaborative work.

Dance in general, not just D.A.D. dance, is continually on a quest for new audiences and new ways of framing work and there are so many avenues still to be explored. We can reach outwards and make new connections without sacrificing integrity and commitment to community.

Thank you.