

# THE SONG OF THE BODY

Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing



PATRON: HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

EDITED BY DR ANNE HOGAN  
FOREWORD BY DARCEY BUSSELL

## Acknowledgements

*The Song of the Body: Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing* is a collective endeavour, and I am deeply grateful to the many champions of dance as a potent means of enhancing wellbeing who contributed to its production. I'd like to thank, first of all, the contributors to the panel discussions, profiles, interviews and articles for so generously giving their time and sharing their expertise and insights. I'd also like to acknowledge the members of the Faculty of Education at the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) and the participants in our pilot project for older learners, which served as the catalyst for a subsequent conference on dance for lifelong wellbeing, and this publication. Dr Carol Martin and Dr Victoria Watts provided invaluable input to the initial preparation of this book. I'm also indebted to my colleagues across the RAD for so enthusiastically supporting the project, and wish to give particular thanks to Aiden Truss, a contributor and copy writer for the RAD, and Sarah Bailey for their assistance with the editing process. My thanks also to Melanie Murphy and Sue Bacchus for their invaluable support of the production and promotion of this work.

Dr Anne Hogan

*Director of Education, Royal Academy of Dance*



## Foreword

**BY DARCEY BUSSELL, PRESIDENT  
OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE**

This important book grew out of the Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing Conference in 2013 that showcased initiatives which went well beyond the usual work of the RAD. It highlighted dance as a means of enhancing lives through improving both social and physical wellbeing.

I am the most passionate advocate of the power of dance as a force for inspiring people, regardless of age and situation, to change their lives and communities for the better.

The stories and case studies in this book show the wide variety of ways in which people engage with dance to enrich their lives whether as a career, for fitness or just as a way to get out and make new friends. It also suggests ways in which we might harness its holistic benefits to serve the physical, social and perhaps even spiritual good.

Above all, this book shows that dance is not just for the theatre or the studio; it needs to permeate every aspect of society. Dance provides an outlet and a form of expression that can bring fulfilment and joy to everyone who takes part.

## Introduction

**DR ANNE HOGAN, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION  
AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE**

From the philosophical axioms of the ancient schools of wisdom to the recent propositions of positive psychology, the meaning of wellbeing has been ceaselessly, and as yet inconclusively, debated. Aristotle, for one, eschewed its equation with mere happiness, suggesting instead that our highest good (‘eudaimonia’) lies in leading a virtuous life and doing what is right. Speculation about precisely what that might consist of, or whether virtue is indeed an efficacious conduit to wellbeing, has further fuelled incalculable hypotheses and lifestyle prescriptions.

Martin Seligman, one of positive psychology’s most influential proponents, has moved from an earlier emphasis on ‘authentic happiness’ to a more holistic understanding of wellbeing as getting the most out of life, or ‘flourishing,’ the essential elements of which are neatly encapsulated within the acronym PERMA: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement. Seligman’s concept is intriguingly comprehensive, aligning as it does the subjective and the relational, but no doubt it will not be the final word on the significance of wellbeing. The slipperiness of the term

has proved ironically commensurate with its predominance as a human pursuit.

*The Song of the Body* hardly presumes to delimit the parameters of wellbeing, but rather to celebrate dance as a powerful means of enhancing it in all its intricate and inter-fused varieties: physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual. The book aims to give a collective, if not necessarily uniform, voice to dance as a tool by which to accelerate one’s capacity for vitality and abundance at all stages of the life cycle. The joy of movement that many of the contributors touch upon surpasses a superficial, feel-good buzz: dance, they believe, can allow our channels of perception to hum intensely, passionately in tandem. Dance, this book suggests, can change your life, at any phase, in amazing – and sometimes unanticipated – ways.

*The Song of the Body* can trace its origins to a research and outreach project for older learners, for which the Faculty of Education at the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) received funding in the summer of 2012. This was from the Community Learning Innovation Fund (financed by the Skills Funding Agency and managed by the National Institute for Adult



Photo credit Peter Bartlett.

Continuing Education). The project was led by Dr Victoria Watts, whose reflections on the project in light of widespread assumptions about ageing as deterioration are included in this book. Victoria was compelled to initiate the project when she came across data attesting to the shift, as monumental as it is swift, in national and international demographics towards an ageing population (*Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing: Project Report*).

Colleagues in the Faculty of Education were keen to join her in exploring how the RAD’s expertise in dance training and education could contribute to ensuring that the exponentially escalating sector of older adults can experience ageing as an active, enjoyable and, indeed, empowering process. As Vicki’s article details, the ensuing pilot project comprised of training for six experienced dance teachers to deliver

dance classes to older learners in a variety of community settings. This in turn accommodated a small scale, qualitative research initiative aimed towards assessing the impact of dance on the health and wellbeing of older adults.

As the Director of Education at the RAD, I had the pleasure of observing firsthand the enthusiasm with which the teachers, and the RAD colleagues who offered them peer mentoring and support, embraced the opportunity to engage with older learners (the eldest of whom was a sprightly 102 years of age). Indeed, their initial enthusiasm morphed into something nearing awe as they witnessed the joy, creativity and social cohesion the dance sessions fostered among the older participants. The playful ambience of the classes seemed particularly poignant in light of increasing evidence suggesting that loneliness and isolation, exacerbated by cuts to local services such as day centres and lunch clubs, may be the greatest detriment to the health of older adults (“Loneliness on the rise among the elderly”). Isolation can not only lead to poor eating habits and less motivation to be physically active, it can even damage the immune system, leading to illnesses such as chronic inflammation (ibid).

To be sure, the sense of collaborative fun in learning new moves emerged for some of the participants by degrees – step by step, as it were. The video documentation, teachers’ notes and the learner’s reports, however, suggested improved physical wellbeing, although further research will be necessary to more precisely ascertain corporeal gain. What was more readily evident, however, as the participants



PART ONE

DANCING  
THROUGH  
LIFE AND  
LIVING  
THROUGH  
DANCE

PANEL DISCUSSIONS FROM  
THE RAD DANCE FOR LIFELONG  
WELLBEING CONFERENCE

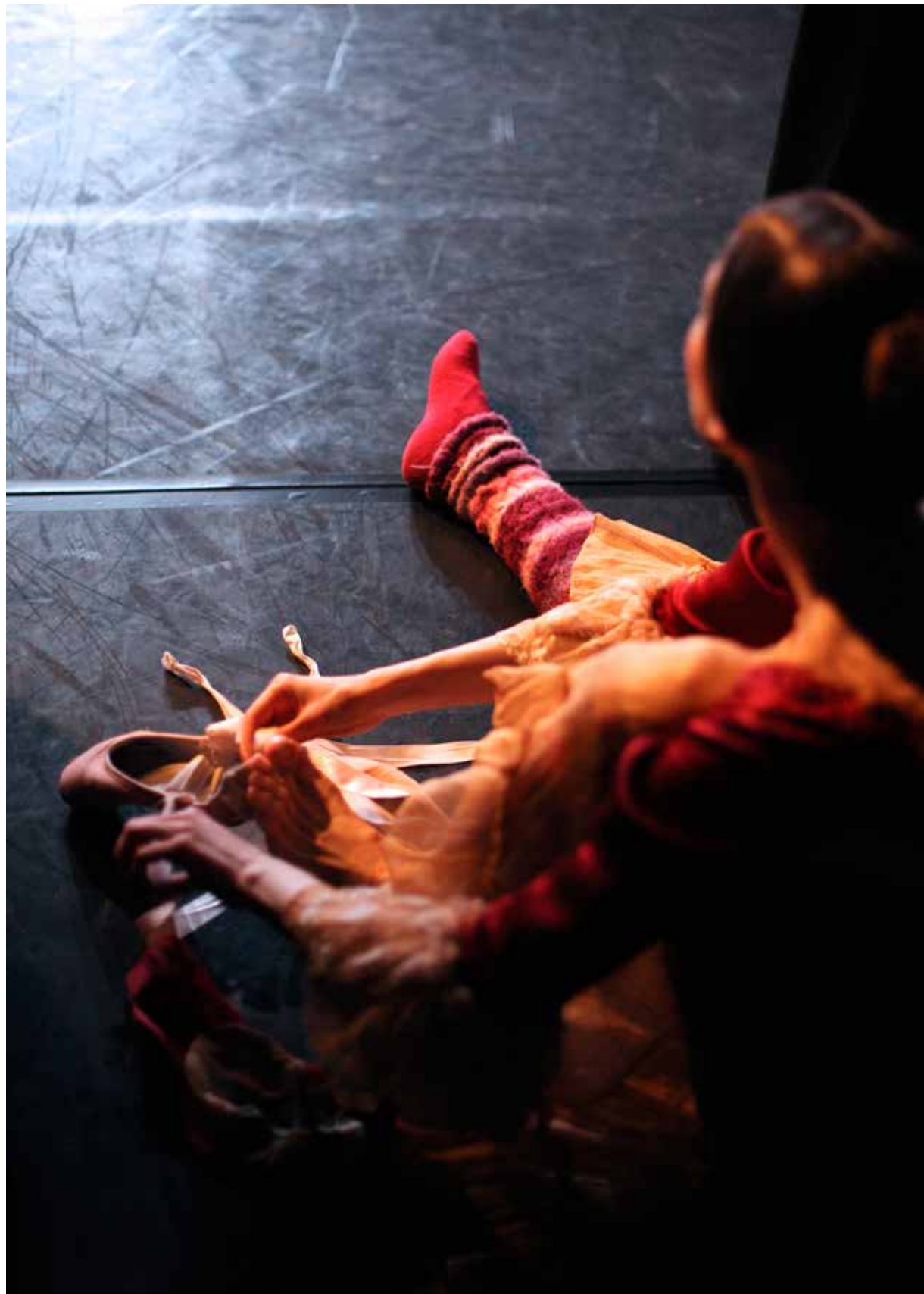


Photo credit Anna Jurkowska.

## Who Cares? The Health and Wellbeing of Professional Dancers

EDITED BY DR ANNE HOGAN, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION  
AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE, PANEL CHAIR

### PANELISTS:

Erin Sanchez: *Dance UK Healthier Dancer Programme and administrator of the Rudolf Nureyev Foundation medical website*

Professor Matthew Wyon: *Professor of Dance Science, University of Wolverhampton*

Mark Rasmussen: *Group Marketing Manager, Harlequin Floors*

Kim Amundsen: *Dancer (formerly with Random Dance Company, Bavarian State Ballet and Matthew Bourne's Adventures in Motion Pictures) and Teacher*

Carol Anne Millar: *Dancer (former Principal Dancer, Birmingham Royal Ballet) and Teacher*

...

ANNE: Our panelists bring with them a considerable range of expertise and vantage points from which to discuss health and wellbeing issues for the professional dance sector. Erin, could you begin by telling us a bit about the Dance UK Healthier Dancer Programme – how did it come about, and what does it do?

...

ERIN: Sure. Dance UK is the national membership support organisation for the professional dance sector, set up in 1982

by and for dancers. The Healthier Dancer Programme sits within that and advocates for and supports dancers' health. The HDP, as we call it, held the first conference on dancers' health in 1990. This led to the first national inquiry into dancers' health and injury, which looked at how injury could be prevented and dancers' performing careers could be maximised. The research findings, published in 1996, indicated that roughly 80% of professional dancers are injured each year, and between 50 and 70% of those dancers were paying for their own injury care regardless of their employment status at the time.

...

ANNE: Those are pretty disturbing findings!

...

ERIN: Absolutely, although the legacy of this research was that some of the largest dance companies employed multi-disciplinary teams to look after their dancers' health and fitness. And while small companies are always going to be limited by their financial capabilities, the research helped to argue for the importance of medical insurance, health care and dance



## Enriching Young Lives: Dance and Personal Development

EDITED BY MICHELLE GROVES, DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF  
EDUCATION, AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF DANCE, PANEL CHAIR

### PANELISTS:

Robert Parker: *Artistic Director,  
Elmhurst School for Dance*

Rob Lynden: *Artistic Director, Dance United*

Rhian Robbins: *Independent Dance Artist*

Fergus Early OBE: *Artistic Director,  
Green Candle Dance Company*

...

**MICHELLE:** Our panel will consider the effect of dance on young people, from training, career development and education, to dance programmes for minority and inter-generational groups. Robert, perhaps you can set the conversation rolling by telling us how vocational dance training has changed since you were a student?

...

**ROBERT:** Having retired fairly recently from Birmingham Royal Ballet, I remember clearly what my own training was like, so I can obviously draw comparisons to what I'm seeing in Elmhurst at the moment. Through conversations with Kevin O'Hare (Artistic Director, Royal Ballet) and Christopher Hampson (Artistic Director, Scottish Ballet),

and as someone who has just stepped out of the industry myself, I feel I can judge what dance companies actually want to see of the young talent coming out of the schools.

It's probably safe to say that training methods have changed dramatically with regard to discipline. Today, dance teachers promote positive discipline in the classroom, whereas when I was a student I can recall instances of students being pulled by their hair, having fingernails scratched down backs to get shoulder blades down, or a lit cigarette held under a knee in a *développé à la seconde*. Hopefully those days are behind us, given our greater awareness of safeguarding. As dance teachers we have a responsibility to look after the welfare of students and produce well-rounded human beings. Concentrating on the individual is definitely different to what it used to be.

Today we are more aware of sports science and psychology. There is just so much we can be learning from the sport sector and it's great to be bringing this knowledge into dance. At Elmhurst we have thorough screenings of our

*Opposite:* Elmhurst School for Dance students waiting in the wings during a Birmingham Royal Ballet rehearsal of *Cinderella*. Photo credit Andrew Ross.



PART TWO

PROJECTS

PROFILES

PERSPECTIVES



## In Conversation: Lauren Cuthbertson and Anne Hogan

**ANNE:** How has being a dancer impacted your perspective on health and wellbeing? A career in ballet certainly poses physical and emotional challenges – are there benefits as well for dancers' overall health?

...

**LAUREN:** The endorphins and adrenaline you get from doing something you love every day are incredible. I have fun every day, even when there are stresses I can always manage to laugh at myself. Life in a company gives you a sense of collective purpose – whether in class or performing, there is a wonderful sense of camaraderie among hard-working professionals, all of whom are passionate about what they do. Dancing professionally also gives you a sense of achievement that replenishes the strains that go with it. You lay everything out there – dancing allows you to express an intense emotional range, so you feel like you're living life to the full, which is what we crave in life.

...

**ANNE:** Is it difficult to cope with the emotional intensity of the roles you perform?

...

**LAUREN:** I do struggle with the excess adrenaline after a performance. You can't

ignore the emotional pressure, even with a role like Aurora (which I performed last night), that doesn't have as many layers as Manon, for instance, or Juliet. To stay balanced, you have to go softly with yourself, to chill out and to pace yourself, though admittedly, sometimes schedules don't allow much time for that.

But the importance of physical and emotional recovery is crucial; I've had to develop means of making space for that through my career. Dancers need to take a free weekend once in a while – the body needs it. If I can manage a free weekend, for instance, I will take Saturday completely off and maybe do some Pilates on the Sunday.

...

**ANNE:** Is Pilates part of your regular training routine? How do you manage to stay sufficiently fit for the range of roles you perform without overdoing it?

...

**LAUREN:** I have a pool of supplementary training methods to draw on. It all depends on what I crave. I know when I'm missing something, and I adjust my training to emphasise strength or length depending on what I need at a particular time. I might swim, do Pilates or a bit of strength conditioning.

*Opposite:* Lauren Cuthbertson as Juliet in The Royal Ballet's *Romeo and Juliet* (Sir Kenneth MacMillan). Photo credit Bill Cooper.





## The Adult Ballet Learner: A Personal Reflection

BY ROSIE GERHARD

In recent years and months, dance schools and institutions, local newspapers, national magazines and online news services have been reporting a burgeoning enthusiasm for ballet amongst adults (“Ballet: the new fitness trend”; Ellison; Plymouth Dance Agency; Robinson; Royal Academy of Dance). However, I myself have noticed numbers growing substantially since the late 1980s when I began attending classes at London’s Pineapple Studios, The Royal Opera House and Dance Attic. From the familiar faces that I see, it seems that many people, like me, attend on a regular basis and continue dancing over decades. While some begin dancing as adults, others return to ballet having studied it as children and teenagers, and a small number of former professional dancers attend for pleasure.

Currently I attend two or three classes a week (including a private lesson), taught by two different teachers: Jo Bell, with whom I have studied for over twenty years, and Olga Semenova, whose classes I have attended for approximately fifteen years. Most of my fellow dancers are female, the youngest in their 20s and the eldest in their 70s.

### Opposing views on adult ballet

My thoughts about the differing perceptions of adult ballet were set off by two *Dancing Times* articles (2006 and 2012) which looked at the achievements an amateur adult ballet dancer might hope to attain. Diane Coyle was attending up to five classes a week:

‘Anybody who is not completely delusional will realise they will not look like a ballet dancer. They will probably not be very good at it. But that isn’t the point. The struggle to achieve beauty is what matters. There is a powerful sense of validation and self-worth from, say, doing a beautiful *port-de-bras* even if you will never get your leg above 45 degrees.’ (cited in McCarthy 27).

In stark contrast, Frederick Lewis, who started ballet at the age of 45, clearly believes that not only can an adult beginner be “very good at it”, but she can even be trained to professional standards:

“Is it ridiculous for a woman in her forties to dream of becoming a ballerina? ... [It] is entirely possible that in our lifetime a ballerina will emerge in maturity ...

*Opposite:* Photo credit David Tett.



## Dancing to Keep the Mind Fresh

MIRA KAUSHIK OBE

From its early days as a provider of evening classes to its transformation into a touring company in the mid to late 1980s, Akademi has cultivated enthusiasm for Indian dance. It was founded in 1979 by the eminent Indian dancer, Tara Rajkumar, who aspired to take classical Indian dance into the UK mainstream. She managed to inspire the late Robin Howard (founder of the Contemporary Dance Trust) and Naseem Khan (founder of Minority Arts Advisory Service and writer of *The Arts Britain Ignores*) to join her in setting up the Academy of Indian Dance. Its mission was to promote the development, appreciation and understanding of classical Indian dance in the social, educational and artistic context of the UK.

The Academy was the first organisation set up to deal solely with Indian dance in London. In the 1990s, we changed our name to Akademi and have since blossomed into a fully-fledged arts development organisation. This is reflected in the creation of the separate and complementary departments of education, community, dance training and dance development. The breadth of our engagement has enabled the South Asian dance aesthetic

to become part of the British artistic DNA, culture and creative economy.

Arriving from the world of cinema, theatre, media and community art, I joined Akademi in the late 80s as its director. Until then, it was predominately a classical dance organisation that produced shows and ran an evening dance school. I sensed that Akademi could broaden its horizons and attract a wider audience by also engaging in South Asian dance, and so I steered the organisation into new directions by streamlining its departments in support of large scale, site-specific, professional productions and setting up the faculty of South Asian dance at the Imperial Society of Teaching of Dance (ISTD). The Education department was designed to bring South Asian dance into schools around the UK, with a long term goal of incorporating it into the mainstream curriculum, while the Community department focused on bringing South Asian dance to the local community. The two merged in 2001 to form the Education and Community department, which we have today. Our twin-track approach enables the Education and Community division to work symbiotically with our Production, Training and Professional Development unit.

*Opposite:* Photo credit Peter Schiazza.