



ICDF Networks

February 2018

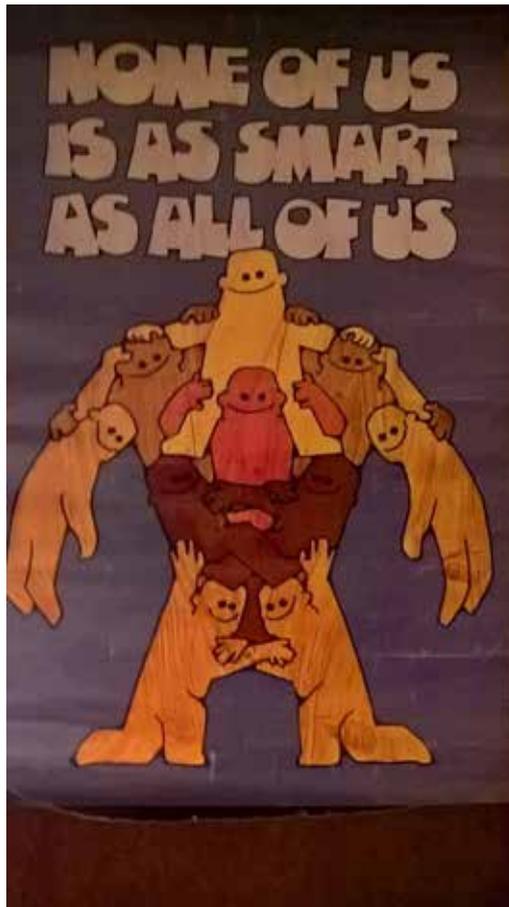
Men in Dance

A year ago Andy Raine, Network Coordinator for Men in Dance, launched a Facebook group for men only. We decided to drop in on him and find out how it was going.

Tell us, Andy, what's been happening with your Men's Network group.

We didn't really used to have a Network, just a changing group of men who coincided at conferences every few years and tried to hang out together. So when I agreed to launch a Facebook group we called it 'Men in Dance Network' as the Network is for Men in Dance. We were determined it would be open to ALL men, regardless of their age, their skills or training, their race or beliefs, their dance experience.

We want it to be a safe and stimulating page for men to visit and connect. They just need to be on Facebook and type in Men in Dance Network, and they can ask to join. Then check out 'Files' and 'Discussion'.



So what's happened this month?

The group has been expanding slowly, and one year on it was time to interview some of the guys who are beginning to connect and to hear their experiences. It's an open group, and we have much to learn from each other.

Here is a 'digest' of excerpts from some of those interviews. Photos were provided by the individual artists.

For info:

To connect with Andy Raine email ...
andy@uppersprings.com

Network Page on ICDF website ...
<http://icdf.com/en/networks/men-dance>

Network Blog Page ...
<https://icdfnetworks.wordpress.com/category/men-in-dance/>

I am a man. I dance.

I am a man who dances, and I stand before God.

From 'MANifesto' - Andy Raine

'Digest of Interviews'

Joshua J Smith

Andy: *I know you have been classically trained and also worked with street dance: is it easy to move between disciplines and styles or to try combining elements of both in one piece?.....*



J: I think it's time that has a major role in the combinations of styles, as two people maybe trying to put together the same styles but have two very different approaches as to how they go about it. It takes time and patience for you to not only figure out how the two styles can become cohesive, but also what is the style itself for you. In my experience connecting breaking (break dance) with contemporary has been very beneficial for both styles. My contemporary is now filled with a much larger selection of movement

and vice versa. My approach was to develop a floor-work style that used the acrobatic elements from breaking aka "power moves", and use contemporary release techniques to soften the dynamics, allowing the movement to flow smoothly with tricks that are presented not to impress but to tell a story.

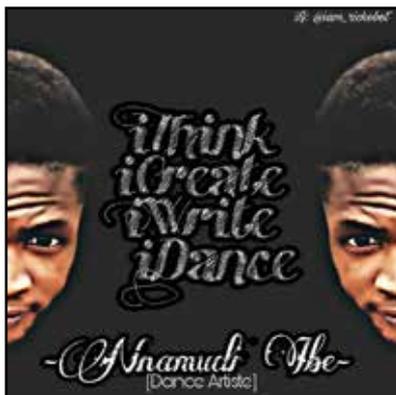
Andy: *Some people have undergone psychological transformation or addressed areas of damage through dance therapy....*

Is it possible that physical expression is universally and instinctively understood, so a dance witnessed by a passer-by could dramatically impact upon their experience?.....

J: I think many factors are at play with this specific topic. In recent months I have been studying the workings of the brain and psychology. As humans we are born with the ability to learn the meaning of facial expressions, to detect messages from one another without the use of language, the fundamental of social networking. A lack of this understanding can be found in recent findings with studies on autism. However when it comes to dance expression I don't think instinctively a person can understand the concepts in the expression, but yes I feel they as a non-dancer would have their own individual interpretation of expression. Whether this impacts someone dramatically I guess depends on the level of interpretation? People are very good at making associations, so for instance if the passer-by had recently lost a loved one and a single performer resembled that loved one, the passer-by could interpret the whole performance expression as that of pain, loss and mourning when it may not be the intention of the choreographer.

Nnamudi Ibe

Andy: *Sometimes what I have already created takes on its own identity, and I relate to it as if it wasn't part of me. It feels like meeting a grown-up child. Do you ever get affected by interacting with your own writing or playing back a video of your choreography?*



N: Yes, a capital YES. I am what i dance, and sometimes, I am what i write. take note of the sometimes. When i write, it comes from past experiences that i learnt from, or something's going on in the society. I don't know how to write fictions... It is always something i have experienced or someone else has experienced. The dance part, I dance to express myself, how i would have loved to be, who i would have loved to be, but yet embracing both people as still me, since the art is from me. Playing my own video, sometimes, i get marveled at myself. The other times, i get disappointed knowing that i can do better. The most amazing thing is reading my own article or poem, mean i would be like, "wow, did i just write that?" especially when it came by instincts, i don't waste any time, immediately i get on facebook and write it, otherwise, i would forget.

Liam Scarth

Andy: *If you try communicating with other people, and are not allowed to speak using words, how soon does it begin to feel normal to understand each other through action and physicality?*



L: This reminds me of the first CONTACT IMPROVISATION workshop I ever went to. At first, I saw it as dancing. Once my inhibitions went, I felt a profound connection with the people I was in-contact with. It felt like we'd had a deep, meaningful conversation. I'm not sure about how soon that happens - it depends on how much each person throws themselves into it, but I do know that in those two hours I felt more connected with those 'strangers' than I have with people I've known for years.

Andy: Sometimes when I see a person dance I know them better than in any other way. I've seen their insides!

L: The naked!

Andy: Unless they've learned how to hide...

Mikey Voon

Andy: *As a dancer, how have you needed to be a man of integrity?*



M: Integrity as a dancer is a calling to be whole. This movement in both physical and spiritual, seen and unseen, felt and unfelt is a journey into the searching for meaning in my life. However, this calling in movement must also rest on steadfastness, truth, thankfulness and peace.

Andy: *What is the relationship between dance and meditation of one kind or another? How do you find they overlap?*

M: Movement and Stillness is a duality of Dance. The circle of movement involves prayer, meditation and contemplation where dance communicates, meditates and contemplates - subtly transitioning our thoughts, feelings and surrendering emptiness. Prayer, meditation and contemplation in movement is the Dance of God.

Andy: *You have been a judge and panellist on TV with Malaysian Idol, as well as a dancer and performer yourself. What is the dynamic of being a recognisable person, and sometimes a celebrity? Is there a gap or discrepancy between who people perceive you to be as a public figure and who you are privately?*

M: I feel very much in the tapestry of us being unique and special. Names of perception is temporary and a distraction. Thus I feel at ease riding on my 26 year old motorcycle, travel to a black tie event in the rain, change into the dress of event, and leave changing back to bike attire, while waving to surprised fellow guests passing by in the parking lot.

As an extra treat the men agreed to share some videos with us that have been shared in their group.

To watch go to

'EXILE Fragment' by Anthony Nikolochev: <https://vimeo.com/108842191>

Dance by Joshua J Smith: <https://www.facebook.com/joshua.j.smith.351/videos/10210480141939734/>

Andrew Laszcz

On the subject of Morris Dancing

Andy: *How did you get involved? Do you like the idea that you're keeping traditional dances alive, and owning them for your own generation?*



A: I was first introduced to Morris dancing at Broadstairs folk festival at about the age of 2. Every year I would watch the dancers up on the clifftop or down by the sand, and would often ask them about their dancing. One year, there was a workshop on Morris dancing for children. This was my first time actually dancing the Morris, and I loved every minute of it. After that, I went onto the internet, found a local side, and started dancing with them. I love the feeling of being part of an older tradition, and bringing that tradition into the future. So many English traditions have been lost over the years, but Morris is still alive, and it feels wonderful to be involved in keeping it that way. The tradition is also by no means static. Morris sides are constantly adding new dances, writing new tunes, and adapting old dances for new audiences. I myself have been involved in the choreographing of a few new dances, and it gives me an enormous sense of happiness to be able to have made my mark on such an ancient style of dance.

Andy: *What is the feeling of being part of the collective energy of a group of men?*

A: Dancing with the other men in my side is great fun. The atmosphere is always very energetic and light hearted, and you can see everybody else is having just as good a time as you are. There is something about the experience that is very hard to describe. The feeling of togetherness emphasised and empowered by the energy of the music and the movement of the dance around you is absolutely amazing.

Harry Kingham

Andy: *When you are confronted by injustice or other ills at large in the world does it inspire you to channel that indignation into performance pieces that provoke more questions or are a form of protest?*



H: Yes! We've been making larger-than-life-sized puppets and pieces of theatre provoked by, for example, the migratory crisis caused by middle-eastern war and conflict. The social injustice ... people fleeing violence and seeking sanctuary .. has informed the work we do. The puppets tell their stories. Also we use historical stories to draw parallels with contemporary struggle.

Andy: *Physical theatre, circus skills, larger-than-life-sized puppets- there seems to be no end to your creative explorations. These outward things draw the interest of a crowd, but do they also create a barrier between you and an individual when you go to speak to them? Do they see you as an extension of the puppet or costume? or can you consciously step beyond that, and easily make a new connection with audience-members on a one-to-one basis?*

H: Putting on costume when you juggle or use circus skills, you are technically just being yourself, but it still creates the diametric opposition of agent and spectator, performer and audience - but if you are a character it introduces yet another factor. That's a barrier we observe but work hard to break through it. We're involved a lot in street-parades, and often we hold workshops that lead into these, so anyone at them becomes a performer and it's a community response. If it's in a park, then often there is no other audience than 100 or 200 participants. At a lantern parade in October there were a thousand people, but it was hard to tell who were observers and who would say they were part of it. That's a blurring of participation and performance.

*This 'Men in Dance Network' * continues to serve ICDF by being available to support men who are involved in any Christian dance.*

*This 'Men in Dance Network' * is mostly a forum open to connecting with ALL men who identify themselves as dancers, regardless of faith or belief, tribe or culture, age, ability, dance-skills and training, nationality or colour.*

** We hope these men will be interested in exploring with us some understanding of what men characteristically bring to the dance, what we enjoy, how we learn, and what can be achieved when men move together... in dance, in integrity of purpose and in friendship.*

- Andy Raine

Anthony Nikolchev

Andy: *I love how edgy everything you do is, the way you struggle to bring concepts alive, you physically stretch your limits, and leave memorable images in the mind of your audiences which continue to provoke us. The strongest memory for me is you carrying piles of books and trying to keep balance whilst manoeuvring them and the woman wrapped around you - that's a strong picture I relate to as a lover, writer and dancer. Here's my question: What are your reflections on the interaction between dance and spoken word?*



A: I think dance never needs to underline the sense of meaning that the words being spoken carry. In fact, I love to find contrasts in meaning but also rhythm/quality/appearances between movement and words if they are "spoken" at the same time. I believe that dance/movement is its own expression that intentionally is not language, so if we choose to explain the experience of dance with words that is merely an attempt to change one medium to another. It is not a problem at all, but must be seen as a dialogue between two different sources of expression/communication. I also believe that the attempt to use words is just as

much as a dance with meaning as is movement. Words are vessels that carry my experience and expectations and attempts at meaning into your versions of the same held by any given word. In general, the dance is about attempting to communicate but never feeling satisfied, for me.

Andy: *One writer on the subject of creativity suggested that we should find what it is that is waiting to be expressed, then let it emerge in whatever form it chose: song, physical theatre, painting, poetry, dance or protest march... Do we have to choose?*

A: I think we end up painting (!) boxes around ideas because as humans we generalize, then categorize, then think we understand, so we move on. But I agree, we do not have to choose. We can choose to pursue that inner tuning-fork, and using whatever tool's available to feel in tune with what we want to send out into the world. I do also, however, believe that going deep into your tools is important. The pursuit of the impossible task in training the eye or the body or the pen is so crucial to making work that is pure and authentic in its expression, not self-indulgent or congratulatory. How to be at peace with the process when everyone is trying to promote their successes all around you?...

Andy: *Sometimes I think your work is like prophecy, interrogating the world as we experience it. Do you believe that as an artist you can change the world?*

A: I believe that before we did the thing we did, the thing we did did not exist, and therefore we throw a little reverb into the world to see where it lands. And if everyone took that chance just with a little throwing of their inner expression out and receiving of others' expressions in, we might live in a little better of a world!

Jack English

Andy: *We're impressed with all you're doing, the free-running, the dancing, your determination and energy. Martha Graham once referred to dancers as 'athletes of God' - that phrase seems to suit you, not just a dancer, but an athlete, too. How do you keep the passion alive that spurs you on to be that athlete and dancer?*



J: The passion comes from actually doing the activity and feeling the energy you get from completing little challenges. There's the flow, the concentration levels that make you forget all your troubles, and the strength it takes to accomplish these movements which makes you feel powerful too.

Andy: *You were a featured dancer last year in a production in Dublin that brought together street dancers and classically trained ballet dancers of different nationalities and experience: How was that for you?*

J: Ahhh yes, 'The Watchmaker' was a great experience. Performing live theatre in the Olympia, the biggest theatre in Dublin. I portrayed a ghost and did flips in front of over 500 people.

Isaac Akorli Gozah

Andy: *When I met you you were the photographer at our danced Stations of the Cross in Ghana, and video-cameraman for flash-mob at a bus-station and dance-performances in a mall. Then you handed over the camera and threw yourself into the action as a performer. Here are my questions for you: Which would you like to pursue the most? performing as a dancer? studying or teaching dance? developing as a photographer and video-producer? filming dance with the insights of a dancer?*



I: Which would you like to pursue the most, you ask? GOOD QUESTION!

Performing as a dancer? NO. A BIG NO. Unless i am outside Ghana. But i am trying to help with all i do so people who looked up to me would keep dancing and not give up like i did. (Technically I haven't given up.)

Studying or teaching dance? Maybe my last resort when all don't go well. I might come back to pursue my masters degree and maybe become a dance lecturer.

Developing as a photographer and video-producer? Apparently, that is the way forward for me now. Even though i am self- taught? I have reached a level where i can match up to the Big Boys. Its only a matter of time, and money starts flowing in. Out here it's survival first, before you worry about fun. Lol. So for now i am definitely going to pursue my cinematography. Doesn't mean i am done with dance. I go for all the dance programs. PS: Still running the dance tv show.

Filming dance with the insights of a dancer? Technically, most random directors don't know the struggles of putting up a choreography and they end up shooting it anyhow. Mostly they end up breaking the aesthetic values of the dance. I have filmed and i am still filming dance videos for some dancers free of any charge as a way of encouraging them. But i can't pursue it as a career because the dancers are underpaid and hence they won't be able to pay me for my services. Can't be "Santa" forever. lol

Andy: *What does the future hold?*

I: What does the future hold? It is said, find what you love and turn it into your career. Well, it doesn't entirely apply to Africans. So even if you find what you love, you need to support yourself with something else. For me luckily i love both. And i would keep dancing any little chance i get. Whether for fun or as exercise.