

# Acosta Danza Evolution (Spring 2020)

## Background information for school and colleges



*Rooster* by Christopher Bruce

### Acosta Danza is a must-see company

In 2015 world-famous dancer Carlos Acosta set up Acosta Danza to showcase Cuban performers and the vibrancy of Cuban culture. Carlos enjoyed 17 years as a principal dancer at the Royal Ballet before formally retiring from the Royal Opera House stage and creating his own company.

The dancers, trained in Afro-Cuban dance styles, ballet and contemporary dance, perform with personality and flair. Acosta selects a range of dance works by international and home-grown choreographers.

The company's ethos is to produce dancers that can combine both classical and contemporary genres effortlessly, imbibed with Cuba's rich musical and dance influences, to create repertoire that is exciting and stimulating and that pushes conventional boundaries. The style is watchable, dynamic and connects with audiences irrespective of any prior dance knowledge.

Acosta Danza's method of dance training is based on the Graham technique merged with stylised elements of Afro-Cuban folklore and rumba, a popular dance in Cuba. The Cuban Modern Dance Technique is unique and characterises the modern and contemporary Cuban dancer. Acosta Danza have further adapted this technique to the characteristics of the dancers in the company who come from both classical and contemporary backgrounds.

### Links to short trailers on Evolution and Acosta Danza

- Carlos and dancers Raul Reinoso, Marta Ortega and Carlos Luis Blanco describe Cuban influence in dance <https://youtu.be/QBcxY5KINZk>
- Performers describe working with Carlos Acosta <https://youtu.be/YE7dDmxCvdY>

- Amidst footage of the company taking daily class, Carlos and performers Letitia Silva and Mario Sergio Elias describe the fusion of styles which came together to form Acosta Danza <https://youtu.be/MjREuvUlXr0>
- Watch the [tour promo](#) for a flavour of the company style and performances and see audience reaction <https://youtu.be/FGvtrVOI4kQ>

### About The Show

Evolution is a mixed bill of four dance works with a running time of 90 minutes including one interval.

Running order:

1. Paysage, Soudain, la nuit (17 mins)
2. Impronta (6 mins)
3. Faun (15 mins)  
*Interval (20 mins)*
4. Rooster (27 Minutes)

The opening dance **Paysage, Soudain, la nuit** approaches Cuban culture through rumba (traditional Cuban music with African roots). The setting is an evocative landscape installation of a wheat field, an installation by Cuban artist Elizabet Cervino. 12 dancers move with lightness and joy; conjuring the exuberance, playfulness and possibility of youth to the melodic rumba-inspired rhythms. Vera Liber of British Theatre Guide describes "arms waving, bodies burgeoning, it is a celebration of youth. Solos, duets, lovers meetings, and group dances, infectious, all welcome." The work is by Swedish choreographer Pontus Lidberg who is a rising star in International dance. It was created especially for Acosta Danza and shows off the dancers strength as contemporary performers.



*Paysage, Soudain, la nuit* by Pontus Lidberg

Maria Rovira created the solo **Impronta** (translates as footprint) especially for company dancer Zeleidy Crespo whose training is rooted in the folkloric dance styles of Cuba. The dancer's strong athletic body dazzles with fast, accurate choreography. Limbs fully extended, skirt swishing, the dance is a dynamic display of expression and virtuosity. The Times describes the performer "undulating and twisting in a Martha Graham-esque long blue dress, embodies a captivating vision of a modern woman paying homage to a revered heritage".



*Impronta (footprint)* by Maria Rovira

Choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's **Faun** has become a modern classic. It is inspired by Nijinsky's *L'après midi d'un faune* (Afternoon of the Faun) and follows an ethereal woodland encounter between a faun and a nymph. The sensual duet sees the dancers in perfect harmony. They weave and entwine their bodies elegantly and expressively. British Theatre Guide's Vera Liber describes Faun as "acrobatic, gymnastic, entwining limbs knotting, contorting, enfolding, a breathtaking fifteen minutes...*Faun* is a knockout" Fashion designer Hussein Chalayan created the costumes. Faun is set to Debussy's original score, with some additional musical interventions by renowned UK composer Nitin Sawhney.



*Faun* by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

**Rooster** is a contemporary dance classic. Preening, sharp-suited men cock their heads and strut the stage embodying chauvinism in play in the 1960s. The 10 performers are dressed for the era – loud shirts, kipper ties, micro-skirts and feather boas. Set to eight tracks by The Rolling Stones, Rooster is a lyrical, energetic and humorous dance with storytelling at its heart. Legendary dancemaker Christopher Bruce created this instant hit in 1991.

Choreographically the dance treads a tricky line between Bruce's exacting choreography and the rock'n'roll abandon of the Stones. Reviewer Lyndsey Winship of The Guardian says "Acosta brings added swagger and relish to the stage. He owns it." The dancers always look like they're having a lot of fun in this dance. Rooster has been seen by audiences across the world and remains widely studied by GCSE and A Level dance students.



*Rooster* by Christopher Bruce

#### Further information

- Trailer for Yuli – a 2018 feature film depicting the journey of Carlos Acosta from a child (nicknamed Yuli by his father) in a run-down Havana neighbourhood to the international dance stages of the world and the first black principal dancer of the Royal Ballet. [https://youtu.be/LY\\_W6w6ngjc](https://youtu.be/LY_W6w6ngjc)
- Filmed in the studio and streets of Havana, a short clip of Carlos Acosta discussing his impetus to create a company to represent the best of Cuban <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SIXRFkgnKc>

## Target Groups

Acosta Danza's Evolution is well suited to students studying performing arts, dance and drama courses including, GCSE, A/AS Level, BTEC, as well as those in Higher Education.

## 10 discussion points for groups

For formal learning, teachers and group leaders may wish to take inspiration from our 10 points for discussion:

1. In the first work *Paysage, Soudain, la nuit* how does the set (an evocative landscape installation of swaying wheat by Cuban artist Elizabet Cerviño) contribute to the atmosphere of the dance? Describe how the dancers interact with the set?
2. Were there any distinctive signature or motif movements which caught your eye? How did these contribute to the mood or storytelling of the work?
3. How does the set and lighting evoke the woodland setting in *Faun*?
4. In the duet *Faun*, by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, what space, levels and pathways do the dancers use? Did you notice specific changes in dynamics at any point?
5. Christopher Bruce's *Rooster* conjures the atmosphere of the swinging 1960s and relationships between men and women. Describe three different male/female interactions from the dance and explain what you think is going on?
6. How do the choreographers create moments of drama in the show?
7. How did watching the dances make you feel?
8. Which dance did you enjoy the most? Why?
9. Artistic Director Carlos Acosta set up Acosta Danza to "create a company which didn't look like any other company out there". What do you think Carlos Acosta means when he says this? Is the show, in particular the dancers way of moving, different from other dance companies you have seen?
10. If you watched the show again, what would you look out for?

## Arts Award

Dance Consortium is pleased to be an Arts Award supporter. Arts Award inspires young people to grow their arts and leadership talents. It connects young people's ambition with action. Our events can support people studying Arts Award at Bronze and Silver Level. Get in touch to find out more.



## Tips for supporting group leaders to prepare for a theatre visit

For teachers, taking a group to the theatre provides the opportunity for students to increase their knowledge of dance and document their experience.

Teachers and groups leaders can be encouraged to support this through:

- Engaging learners in some preliminary research of the dance company, choreographer and the works
- Leading a discussion prior to the visit to develop an awareness of live performance in a theatre.
- Attending a post-show talk can be very beneficial. Each venue is hosting one free talk, offering the chance to put questions to the company. Hosted by a local dance professional, audiences will hear about the inspirations, influences, challenges and adventures behind presenting the show. There may be some questions students can ask company members about making the show or how it feels to perform in the show.
- Setting a task with key points for learners to consider during their theatre visit – for example recalling or recording details of costume, music, noting the mood (up-tempo, dynamic, thoughtful, funny) and choreographic style of the dances; or noticing repeated movement phrases or motifs.
- Ask students to share initial responses with each other with the performance fresh in everyone's minds.

Share feedback with the venue via social media or young writers schemes. Dance Consortium loves to hear feedback on our tours.

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For more information about Dance Consortium's year-round learning and engagement programme to inspire through dance contact [learning@danceconsortium.com](mailto:learning@danceconsortium.com)

