

Your weekend

Tomorrow in The Magazine for Yorkshire...



Stamp of approval: Galleries might be closed at the moment but an innovative new service allows artists to share their work.

Slipway heroes: Six years ago Jack Lowe embarked on an ambitious project to photograph every RNLI station and their crews. Chris Bond charts his progress.

Big Interview: Gina Miller has campaigned against corporate corruption and took on Boris Johnson's Government over Brexit. But, as she tells Sarah Freeman, she's not done yet.



Fashion: Leeds designer Bo Carter's latest collection has been inspired by the Sahara and her fellow female marathon runners.

Recipes: Food writer Becky Excell shares some of her favourite recipes in her new cookery book, *How to Make Anything Gluten Free*.

Real Homes: Newly decorated B&B in Hawes is designed to make guests smile.

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VISITING COMPANY: The Acosta Dance Company performed at the Bradford Alhambra in spring last year.

A world of dance

Continuing his virtual tour of Yorkshire's theatre landscape, this week **Nick Ahad** profiles the work of the Dance Consortium.

I'll admit it: there was something selfish about wanting to write a series of profiles about our theatres. It was an opportunity for me to revisit vivid and important memories of beautiful theatres and moments I have experienced.

I seem to have ended up at the Alhambra Theatre in Bradford a couple of times now. I suppose you always remember your first. It was the first place I saw pantomime as a child, the first place I saw 'proper' theatre when the RSC came to town and in 2007 it was the first time I came across contemporary dance.

It's an artform that seduced me from the moment I saw it and that happened thanks to the Dance Consortium.

Made up of 18 of the largest and most successful UK theatres, including the Bradford Alhambra and the Hull New Theatre, it was set up 20 years ago in order to tour work only previously seen in London to regional audiences and since then has presented 46 tours by 26 companies to over 700,000 people.

So not a theatre or a company, but an organisation that has been absolutely instrumental in adding to the rich theatrical culture we enjoy in the county.

Ros Robins is executive director of Dance Consortium.

"We exist to tour the best international dance companies from across the world to cities across the UK," she says.



It is a simple, almost evangelical mission – and it works.

"We tour only the best and most exciting international dance companies, companies whose style of work would not otherwise be seen on UK stages," says Robins. "The 18 member theatres of the consortium select each company to be toured and the companies have to be of exceptional quality, with work that will have audiences

sitting on the edges of the seats." When Robins says this work would 'not be otherwise seen on UK stages', she's not exaggerating. There is a significant cost to bring a dance performance to the stage, a cost that would be prohibitive for a theatre to carry on its own.

That performance I saw in 2007, by Nederlands Dans Theater, was made possible by the coming together of the theatres involved in the Dance Consortium. Together they can share the financial burden.

It's good for audiences, meaning we get to see truly world class dance on our doorsteps, but it's also good for the future.

Robins says: "Alongside every tour there is a programme of learning and participation activities that aims to give audiences an insight into the lives of the dancers and the work being presented and provides opportunities to dance with international artists."

"We work with schools and colleges in each of the cities we visit, we run a talent development programme for young UK dancers and a Future Leaders programme for young people looking at possible careers in the theatre."

The Alhambra Theatre, Bradford is one of the longest serving members of Dance Consortium while the Hull New Theatre is one of the most recent.

One of the last performances

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DANCE WORKS: Dada Masilo's Giselle, above; and inset Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform Revelations.

PICTURE: LAURENT PHILIPPE, CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN

presented by the Dance Consortium before the closure of theatres due to the pandemic was a visit by the Acosta Danza Company to the Alhambra in spring of last year starring Carlos Acosta. The performances were hugely successful, with hundreds of people staying behind after the first performance to meet dancers from the Acosta company.

Robins says: "We hope to return to the region in the autumn of 2021 with the first Dance Consortium tour by a very exciting Canadian circus and dance company and a visit to the Hull New Theatre as part of the Hull Freedom Festival."

The consortium chief took up her role in 2016 having worked in regional theatre and serving as a regional director for the Arts Council in the West Midlands.

"I had always been excited by seeing the work of the

international dance companies presented by Dance Consortium – the stories told by the companies and the styles of the work were so different from anything else that the theatres were presenting."

It's difficult to overstate how different and how impressive that work is.

Without the Dance Consortium the American company Alvin Ailey would not have come to Bradford –

the figures would simply not stack up. I've seen the company twice at a theatre on my doorstep, along with thousands others, thanks to its collectivism.

"Without Dance Consortium it just would not be possible for international dance companies to visit regional theatres and perform to local audiences – the cost of bringing a company over from Europe, America, South

Africa or even Australia would be prohibitive.

"At a time when it seems all the more important to have a relationship with artists from across the world, to understand their challenges and perspectives, the work of Dance Consortium seems particularly important."

For the Chief Executives of the Theatres, like Adam Renton in Bradford, the dance companies bring a much needed diversity and richness to their programmes and an opportunity to engage directly with their local communities.

"I have particularly fond memories of an after show question and answer event with Ballet BC at the Alhambra," says Robins. "A member of the audience stood up and personally thanked Adam for bringing such exciting dance to Bradford."

In the words of the song, it wasn't me. But it could have been.

HOPES OF TOURING AGAIN IN AUTUMN

■ "Obviously we are some way off being able to bring international companies into the UK and into our regional theatres," says Ros Robins. "We stopped one tour half way through in spring of last year and have since postponed two more but we hope to be touring again in the autumn. Our sense

from the digital programmes that we have shared over the past year is that audiences are really looking forward to sharing that live collective experience again."

■ For more information on Dance Consortium and future tours visit danceconsortium.com

TOP 5: Pick of the best stage



1 Open air Macbeth: The Lord Chamberlain's Men will be bringing an open air production of Shakespeare's Macbeth to Harewood House this August. The all-male cast perform in Elizabethan costumes with music and dance. Dates to be confirmed. tlcm.co.uk



2 Get into acting: Leeds Actors in Training is offering free online masterclasses throughout March 2021. The practical skills-building course for young adults serious about an acting career will be run in collaboration with Leeds Grand Theatre. leedsheritagetheatres.com



3 Earnest goes digital: The Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield and The Dukes, Lancaster, are to co-produce a digital adaptation of Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest running from April 19 to May 4. Tickets importanceofbeingearnest.com



4 Summer at Castle: Summer concerts have been confirmed at Castle Howard with tenor Wynne Evans and soprano Victoria Joyce headlining an al fresco Proms. The event is set to take place from August 20-21. Tickets castlehoward.co.uk



5 Theatre to re-open: Scarborough's Stephen Joseph Theatre will re-open its doors to the public on May 17, with the first live show of The Greatest Play in the History of the World, starring Julie Hesmondhalgh, opening a day later. sjt.uk.com