

COMMUNITY DANCE

Dance can give a voice to the voiceless!

Royston Maldoom

"Community Dance is the most democratic form of dance as an art form."

Community Dance is an activity which is relatively widespread in some European countries (mainly in Great Britain), the USA and Canada. It is an organised activity (by institutions such as municipalities, cultural centres, schools, artistic groups) and is aimed at everyone. It is a way for citizens of all ages, abilities, classes, races, religions and nationalities to meet the art of dance and to express themselves through it. Even minority groups: children and young people excluded from basic education, the homeless, people with special needs and prisoners are just some of the social groups to which it may be offered. More specifically, Community Dance offers the opportunity for people to express themselves with their bodies in an artistic context. It helps people become acquainted with and accept their bodies; it cultivates kinaesthetic ability, activates creativity, and boosts physical and mental well-being. It has great artistic and educational importance: people learn new things and develop socially since, via group work, participants become more connected to their cultures and to each other. Everyone has equal opportunities to participate, to apply themselves and to learn. In other words, Community Dance builds stronger communities! Contact with this activity may be accomplished either via weekly lessons, or via projects leading to presentations or performances. In the latter case, where there is an ultimate goal, the result is even more impressive, as the impetus for the participants is increased and the idea of displaying and sharing it with the public makes the experience even more beautiful and powerful. In Greece, groups which have used such a scheme to work with minority groups are Lathos Kinisi, Angeloskoni and Fygein Adinaton, as well as the dancer-choreographer Georgia Petraki in Heraklion, Crete (forgive me if I have left anyone out).

Once such performance took place with great success in the Duncan Dance Centre, in collaboration with the British Council, in September 2007 at the Teatro Vrachon in Vyronas, Athens. Led by guest choreographer Luca Silvestrini (Protein Dance), approximately 60 residents of Vyronas, between 2 and 92 years old, worked together for about four weeks, resulting in a very moving and mutually beneficial work entitled "Stavrodromi" (Crossroads). Community Dance has the possibility of enlarging the dancing public and, as the style's pioneer Royston Maldoom says, "The public is better informed about, but also ready to ask for more from the art of dance." In addition, it can offer satisfying work for professional dancers, and generate more income from sponsorship. It develops dance as an art form and brings it face to face with daily reality.

A study which was carried out in Great Britain in 2000 showed that more than 4 million people were involved in community dance programmes! In Greece, where dance is an important element of the culture and of daily life, it is not only unknown but there is not even a thought of incorporating it into the school syllabus. But oh, don't worry. There's always "So You Think You Can Dance"!!

"COMMUNITY DANCE IS FIGURING OUT WHERE ART MEETS LIFE"

Comment on canadacommunitydance.com

Images from rehearsals for the performance of "Stavrodromi".

Sources and information: www.communitydance.org.uk,

<http://canadacommunitydance.com/what-is-community-dance/>, www.royston-maldoom.net