

NORTHERN ECHO – Preview:

World Dance on your Doorstep
Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance

For 52-years the Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance (BIFF) has been attracting dance companies from all over the globe to entertain audiences with performances influenced by their customs and culture. This year's theme is "portrait of a distant land...across the seas".

The Folklore Festival is recognised the world over as the Glastonbury of the International dance circuit. One of the Mexican contingent [Ballet Folkorico Estado de Hidalgo] even held a press conference like a rock star saying they were attending the Billingham centrepiece. This is a big deal!

The week-long showcase, 13-20 August, will have something for everyone from Mariachi bands to the very best in Contemporary dance.

This year the countries being represented in Stockton-on-Tees will be Chile, Egypt, Martinique, Mexico, North Cyprus, Russia, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

The opening weekend will set the standard for the whole seven-days to emulate. BIFF kicks off on Saturday (13th) at Billingham Forum swimming pool with "Synchronised" by Balbir Singh Dance Company - a stunning show that offers audiences a dance, synchronised swimming and live music spectacular. The one-off event pays homage to Busby Berkeley's legendary Hollywood 'water musicals' of the 1940s and 50s with an influence of traditional North Indian Kathak dance. It was originally commissioned for the London 2012 Olympic Games.

This is followed on the same night by a fast paced, jammed-packed, 2-hour World Gala entitled 'Faces of Dance' at Billingham Forum Theatre; showcasing the talents of dancers from six countries all wearing their traditional national dress. The event includes the official North-East premiere of 'Boundaries' by BBC Young Dancer 2015, Connor Scott and Vidya Patel (winner of the South Asian Dance Category). The stage will be awash with passion and a rainbow of colours.

There will be no escaping BIFF 2016. It will be staging shows in and around Billingham and also visiting Middlesbrough Theatre. There will even be performances in unlikely places like a bingo hall. The Festival epicentre will be the Festival Arena situated in Billingham Town Centre that will deliver a double daily dose of dance in the afternoon and evening.

The Festival is also privileged to have the premiere of "Interrupted Souls" by Newcastle-based Eliot Smith Company (Forum Theatre / 19 Aug). If that is not enough there's Uncle BIFF Children's Club, International Youth Dance Workshops, Cave of Hands and Painting the Indian Gods.

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