

A Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance media item:

NEWCASTLE DANCE INVASION OF TOP INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

A celebrated global festival is bracing itself for a dance invasion by Newcastle-based performers, who are looking to unleash their majestic skills and techniques to the watching eyes of the world.

This week they are comparing notes and hatching their battle plan, as final rehearsals are underway before they embark on the small 37-mile journey across the North-East to entertain audiences at the 52nd Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance (BIFF) / 13-20 August.

Here's the creative rollcall introducing the performers in action:

CONNOR SCOTT, who won BBC Young Dancer 2015 is from Blyth in Northumberland; and trains at Dance City's Centre For Advanced Training in Newcastle. Connor will be performing a duet entitled "Boundaries" at BIFF with Vidya Patel, winner in the South Asian Dance Category from Birmingham. They will be taking to the stage of the Billingham Forum Theatre as part of a 2-hour extravaganza "Faces of Dance" (Saturday 13th August, 8pm) alongside dancers from as far afield as Chile, Martinique, Mexico, South Korea, Bashkortstan (Russia).

Connor and Vidya's new duet "Boundaries" reflects a sense of harmony between the two dance styles of Kathak and Contemporary. The piece has been saved for prestigious gatherings including BIFF, with the first showing being the curtain-raiser for Navadisha 2016 – International Dance Conference.

Connor, aged 18, showed an interest in dance at the early age of three-years-old; and since winning the competition [BBC Young Dancer] life has definitely been different, as he moved to London and began training at the illustrious, Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance.

Connor talks about life after winning BBC Young Dancer of the Year. He said "Since winning the competition life has most definitely been different! I moved to London last September and began my training at Rambert School, which has opened my eyes hugely in and outside of the studio already. I've also had some amazing opportunities to dance at some beautiful venues and events alongside some insanely talented artists, which has been a privilege and also gave me an insight into what's to come in the industry in the future."

Connor and Vidya met during the BBC Young Dancer of the Year competition and their friendship and creative flare will be onstage for all to see during "Faces of Dance". Connor said: "Throughout the creation process, we both talked about the innocence and purity of our passion for dance. I think going through the competition and then onto collaborating together has meant a great deal to me, and gaining a strong friendship offstage has created a connection in our movement onstage."

Connor goes on to talk about the importance of events such as BIFF 2016. He said: "I think the North-East doesn't gain the recognition for what's on offer up here because the talent is booming and should be showcased; so without wonderful events like BIFF - dancers wouldn't have this platform to exhibit their work and skills."

ELIOT SMITH has been dancing since the age of 13-years-old attending 'Pop Steps' classes at Dance City and later being accepted into the Imagine8 Youth Dance Company, Northern Youth Dance Company and was one of the first students at Dance City's Centre for Advanced Training Programme (CAT). Eliot went onto graduate from London Contemporary Dance School and part of The Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance alumni.

Eliot, aged 25, is currently artistic director and principal dancer for Eliot Smith Company (ESC) based at The Barre Studios on Newcastle's Quayside. ESC celebrates its 5th Anniversary later this year. Eliot was born and raised in Heaton with his parents being the sole-proprietors of a jewelry, watch and clock shop; where they lived as a family above the shop. He now lives in Northumberland.

Eliot Smith Company are billed to perform two impressive dance works at BIFF 2016. Eliot is premiering and performing INTERRUPTED SOULS choreographed by Lorenzo Pagano, who is a current soloist dancer for The Martha Graham Dance Company; with the second piece being 'SPACE' – originally choreographed last year by Maggie Boogaart.

Eliot said: "I believe BIFF is very important for North-East based dance companies, artists and the public. It's a time for everyone to unite both from the North-East and beyond from various countries around the world; and share one passion and strength...DANCE.

"The Festival also contributes to our world culture. I believe dance has the power to transform lives and dance is an education for living; BIFF contributes to this. BIFF has helped support ESC both within performance platforms and public engagements. I hope BIFF continues to grow and support others. I believe the North East is a powerhouse for contemporary dance."

Eliot concluded: "I am very excited to be premiering Interrupted Souls at Billingham. I like to think Eliot Smith Company brings something different on stage both from our impressive company dancers and by the works we present. Both works we'll be performing present highly physical and technical movement, enriched by our emotional feelings that everyone can relate too. We're currently gearing up to entertain and inspire at BIFF.

"There's only a few dance festivals in the North and BIFF is one of them. BIFF plays a major role within the dance scene in the North and contributes to this powerhouse of great dance."

YUVEL SORIA has the privilege of attending BIFF in the capacity of both teacher and performer. Firstly, he's taught seven young dancers aged between 11 and 17 years old from Macmillan Academy in Middlesbrough to create a contemporary dance piece with traditional Bolivian and South American dance as inspiration...with stunning results!

The theme for the BIFF residency was all about 'encounters' – having people with different backgrounds and techniques all performing together in the dance space at Macmillan Academy. The final piece they produced was 5-minutes long.

Yuvel Soria, said: "It has been really exciting! The young people have responded very well. They are interested in learning new things and trying different styles. We have been working intensively on this new piece for the Festival."

Yuvel, was born and brought up in Bolivia but has been living in Tyne and Wear for the past ten-years. Prior to his move, he spent a decade with a Traditional Bolivian Dance Company, where he trained, performed and toured nationally and throughout South America.

He retrained as a contemporary dancer in Newcastle, graduating with a BA Hons in Contemporary Dance. Yuvel has been working as a performer, choreographer and dance practitioner in the local community particularly in education and fitness. His work draws from both cultures he is associated with, Bolivian and English.

Yuvel added: "The young dancers have a real drive and desire. They have a lot of talent and skills. When a group is put together with all of those strong components, I personally find that interesting and challenging."

Yuvel will also be performing at BIFF as a soloist and as part of Balbir Singh Dance Company. Yuvel was chosen from a strong group of North-East based dancers, who auditioned to work with the Yorkshire company during their residency at the Folklore Festival.

On Saturday August 13th on the opening day of BIFF, he will dance in "Synchronised" at the Billingham Forum swimming pool, which is a stunning show offering 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.

Yuvel is being kept busy during the week-long Festival with a solo slot during the "Dance Gateway" event at the Festival Arena [Mon August 15th]. He will also dance in a specially choreographed piece devised for the unveiling of a new sculpture cited in the Town Centre called "World United by Dance" [Wed August 17th].

Other Tyne & Wear based performers dancing with Balbir Singh Dance Company at BIFF 2016 include Emma Palmer (Washington), Abbie Ross (Sunderland) and apprentice, Carys Applebee (Shieldfield, Newcastle).

More about BIFF 2016:

The Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance is being staged between 13 and 20 August with the town welcoming countries from all over the world including Chile, Egypt, Martinique, Mexico, North Cyprus, Russia, South Korea and of course the United Kingdom.

Olga Maloney, Artistic Director of Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance, said: "We are lucky to have such a rich array of talented dancers being trained and developed in the North East. This year's Folklore Festival continues to provide audiences with a good balance of traditional and contemporary dance; and the performers hailing from Newcastle make-up a major part of the contemporary element. It promises to be fantastic!"

Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance is made possible by support from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Arts Council England through its National Lottery funded Grants for the Arts programme.

If you want to learn more about the shows at BIFF involving the Newcastle-based dancers please visit www.billinghamfestival.co.uk or on social media via Facebook facebook.com/billinghamworldldancefestival and on Twitter @BillFest.

The website also includes a box office section, where people can buy tickets online at www.billinghamfestival.co.uk/store or by calling 01642 553 220.

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