

A Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance media item:

NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY PREPARE TO DIVE INTO FESTIVAL DEEP END

The artistic director and composer of a unique swimming pool-based performance piece originally commissioned for the London 2012 Olympic Games; were in Billingham to checkout their latest world stage (well, swimming pool!)...this being timely with Rio 2016 on the sporting horizon.

Balbir Singh and Jesse Bannister of Balbir Singh Dance Company recently visited the Billingham Forum swimming pool; where on 13th August their stunning show “Synchronised” will have audiences in awe of the 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.

‘Synchronised’ opens the 52nd Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance which takes place between 13th and 20th August. The show contains ten swimmers, ten dancers and live orchestral music including a guest appearance from members of the visiting Chile dance troupe.

Just in case some people aren’t able to book that family holiday abroad – BIFF 2016 is bringing the world to Stockton-on-Tees. In August, the Festival will be hosting dance companies from Chile, Egypt, Martinique, Mexico, North Cyprus, Russia, South Korea and of course the United Kingdom.

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.

Balbir Singh talks about playing a big part if BIFF 2016 and the inspiration behind “Synchronised”. He said: “It’s an exciting and fantastic opportunity to be asked to open this year’s Festival.

“I’ve always loved swimming so as a dancer, I’ve wanted to find a way of bringing sport, culture and dance together. Synchronised swimming isn’t a first past the post sport as there’s a whole choreography and musicality behind it. The sport has a lovely affinity with dance. This is especially relevant as the Kathak style of dance is a lot about depicting things in water. The results being a lovely narrative for all of the family to enjoy.”

Balbir concluded: “It’s wonderful to be engaging not only with the Folklore Festival itself but with the local community. This is an exciting time to be performing at BIFF with so many cultures of the world coming together in one place to celebrate dance.”

Jesse Bannister, composer of Synchronised, said: “Water has such an energetic sound - made by things like droplets of rain through to waves and splashes in the river, lake, bath or swimming pool. There’s so many different ways that we all hear water. This was my starting point, to show how a composition or piece of music could mirror that sound. We have a choir, piano, Tabla, and Indian singing expressing songs that reflect the current and nature of the sea. There’s a beautiful connectivity between the water, music and dance. The great thing about Synchronised is that the audience can expect the unexpected.”

There’s even a way for people to get involved in “Synchronised” with free workshops taking place on 2nd and 4th August; creating new cast members for the show. People to register their interest at info@billinghamfestival.co.uk

Balbir Singh Dance Company are ever present throughout BIFF 2016 acting as a company-in-residence. They will be delivering a number of projects asides from Synchronised. They will be bringing together an intriguing free project - "Painting the Indian Gods" – where a blend of performance and art are mixed into a cultural melting pot. This will include a community cast made up from local people, who attend free dance workshops (1/3/5 August); with the results being performed on Friday 19th August in the atrium of Billingham Forum.

The company will also choreograph an introductory piece for the unveiling of a commissioned sculpture by artist Carmen Avalos in the centre of Billingham entitled "World United by Dance" (on Wednesday 17th August).

Roy Broadbent, Manager of Billingham Forum, said: "The Festival is part of the town centre's heritage, and is a huge element of what we deliver to the community. The Forum is incredibly proud to be part of this experience. We've got a swimming pool that will stage a Busby Berkeley style musical. It promises to be fantastic with synchronised swimming and dance bringing something special to the Centre for the people of Billingham.

"We're always excited when the Festival comes to Billingham but this year it's particularly important for us because we are very much part of the whole staging process."

'Synchronised' opens the Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance on Saturday August 13th in the Billingham Forum at 5.30pm. The pool is operated by Tees Active; and the tickets range from £5 (adults), under 16s £3, family (2 adults, 2 children) £10.

The official website has an online box office where people can purchase tickets from www.billinghamfestival.co.uk/store - the site also contains the full festival programme.

The box office telephone number is 01642 553220 and there's a walk-in box office situated in Billingham Town Centre - 5 West Precinct with the opening times of Monday to Saturday / 10.30am until 2.00pm. People can pay by cheque, postal order or cash.

BIFF 2016 is all about festival firsts: 'Faces of Dance' will showcase the talents of BBC Young Dancer 2015 Winner, Connor Scott (of Northumberland) and Vidya Patel, winner in the South Asian Dance Category (13th August, Forum Theatre).

The Festival is also privileged to have the premiere of "Interrupted Souls" by Newcastle-based Eliot Smith Dance Company, which forms part of the World Dance Gala (Forum Theatre on 19th August).

This year's theme is "Portrait of a Distant Land...across the Seas" and we look forward to welcoming audience to venues in Billingham and Middlesbrough.

Those venues include the Festival Arena (town centre), the Billingham Forum Theatre and Swimming Pool, Billingham Town Centre Ramp, Billingham Forum Atrium and Middlesbrough Theatre...there's something to see and do every day!

You can follow the Festival on social media via Facebook [facebook.com/billinghamworlddancefestival](https://www.facebook.com/billinghamworlddancefestival) and on Twitter @BillFest

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