

Balbir Singh Dance Company

The emergence of Balbir Singh Dance Company onto the national and international stage comes at a time when our understanding of cultural identities is undergoing profound change at all levels of society and in all realms; the economic, the personal and the social as well as the artistic. This general unravelling of previously accepted categories has led to new forms of expression and new modes of discourse, especially in the arts where practitioners seek to express themselves in ways that reflect the transcultural reality of their experience.

Balbir Singh's own personal history mirrors this shift. Growing up as a British boy in two northern English cities, with almost entirely western cultural influences and models, the young Balbir Singh had little time for his Sikh heritage, and came late to the world of North Indian traditional dance. In fact, Balbir Singh only started to learn about the Kathak tradition as an adult, when asked (no doubt on the basis of the colour of his skin) if he could develop 'some Indian dance' for a British dance company.

Commentators will search in vain to find in Balbir Singh's work evidence of England's famously complex relationship with India. Balbir Singh himself is adamant that his was a cross-cultural upbringing, except in his case the two cultures were Bradford and Leeds. And he pinpoints his move from insular Bradford to cosmopolitan Leeds as being the biggest spur to his eventual creative direction.

With this highly individual take on the meaning of cultures it is hardly surprising that the work of Balbir Singh Dance Company is seen as more post-structural than post-colonial. Even the centrality of Kathak in the company's work stems more from Balbir Singh's fascination for its numerical systems than from any religious motivation.



A recent residency at Yorkshire Dance Centre,
brought together the ideas and aspirations
from a year long evaluation process

Balbir Singh's facility with number (he can't climb stairs without knowing how many there are when he reaches the top) found a natural outlet in the numerical symbolism of Kathak, whose structuring around time cycles, the most popular being the 16 beat time cycle (teen taal), quickly became a source of mathematical inspiration.

Yet characterising the work as mathematical and abstract completely fails to capture the irresistibly engaging, even moving experience of watching Balbir Singh's work. There is a deeply emotional content in the work which touches the audience, albeit without evoking a particular story or representational motif; the lasting impression is of having witnessed something profoundly human in its lyricism.

At the same time Balbir Singh Dance Company does ask its audience to use their mind to make abstract connections between shape, pattern, rhythm, colour, mood and affect in ways that defy categorisation by national-cultural or stylistic norms.

Yet while this is dance that exercises your mind, it is not 'difficult' in the way so much Contemporary dance feels the need to be. And though there is much here for the Contemporary dance audience, fans of world music are just as likely to be entranced by the performance.

A feast for the intellect and for the senses, a journey that will take you through places that feel familiar without quite being able to work out how you know about them, Balbir Singh Dance Company's work is synthetic in the fullest sense: a collision of two seemingly opposite starting points resulting in a new, very different thing – a true synthesis.

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Balbir Singh's notes for the dancers also help the Tabla player to interpret pulse and tone

Balbir Singh's work captures the essential qualities of living in multi-cultural Britain today and asks the question: When two cultures meet can they combine to create an exciting synthesis? Balbir Singh Dance Company's work illustrates that the answer to this question is a resounding 'yes'



BalbirSingh dancecompany

“I was riveted to the performance, which was technically breathtaking and beautiful to watch. The piece was contemporary, classy and evocative. It was a delight for the theatre that the performance attracted such a broad audience from dance connoisseurs to enthusiastic social dancers, theatregoers, young people and schools and even better that they all loved it!”

*Victoria Firth, Director,
Lawrence Batley Theatre*

If you would like to know more about Balbir Singh Dance Company call 01484 421568 or visit www.balbirsinghdance.co.uk

