



Hemantika Festival London 2017. Photo credit: Simon Richardson "The curtain raiser at the finale was joyous to behold", Pulse Connects, Winter 2017

ENRICHING EDUCATION, NURTURING INNOVATION AND PROMOTING EXCELLENCE

Hello all and welcome to the SBDC 2018 newsletter. May this year be a fantastic one for you and your family. SBDC is certainly looking forward to bringing you all an exciting and eventful 2018.

As I'm sure you all know, the highlight of 2017 was the Hemantika Festival. With everyone's support we were able to bring Kathak legend Pandit Birju Maharaj and Saswati Sen to Barcelona and UK and what an inspirational week of performances and masterclasses they delivered.

As in other years, the progress made by SBDC's students in 2017, made me extremely happy and proud. Last year, around 60 students took ISTD exams, from Primary level up to Advanced level 2 (the final grade) and the average mark was very high, at around 75%.

Many of our young dancers are performing at major events and winning great praises: Jaina Modasia was the solo winner at NAVADAL 2017 in the senior category, Sonia Chandaria-Tillu won the European leg of the Kalashram Kathak competition, Vidya Patel received a standing ovation, from audiences in Goa, for her new duet 'About the Elephant' and Mithun Gill continues to pursue a very successful full-time dance career.

I strongly believe in the value of dance education and the multiple transferable skills it offers. It gives me huge pleasure to see the energy of the young people, how they enter the class with smiling faces and leave with a strong sense of achievement. We have now introduced an adult class and such was its popularity, that it was over-subscribed even before the term began. I can't wait for them to perform at this year's Hemantika Festival. I love the commitment and innovative minds of our senior student dancers; they commit their time, in spite of holding down demanding jobs and/or running busy households. We have also introduced a monthly half-day intensive training session for advanced students and taken on new young people for our Youth Group, who receive additional performance and training opportunities.

2017 was a great year for SBDC, but 2018 has many exciting things in store too. Our Company has already received an invitation to tour in the US in March and a big change for this year is that we will be looking for a new home. Victoria Hall is likely to close after the summer, so we are beginning the process of finding a fresh new space; we will keep you all informed of any developments.

Finally, as a school and company we are extremely grateful and fortunate to have the immense support of the students' parents, guardians and friends, without which, very little would happen. I see a great future for Indian Dance in this country and hope, with your support, that SBDC will continue to train brilliant dancers, curate interesting events and nurture dance leaders of the future. I will end on one of my favourite quotes from **Swami Vivekananda**:

'My faith is in the younger generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem.'



The 2017 Full Circle Tour of India (February) was the second year of the tour, so called because SBDC is taking Kathak back to the country where the artform originates and where Sujata Banerjee first began her dance journey. In 2017 Sujata, Vidya, Jaina and Saloni performed in Delhi at the annual Ravi Shankar Festival and later in the tour, at the Vasantotsav Festival, to honour Pandit Birju Maharajji, who joined us later in the year in London for our Hemantika Festival.



U.Dance 2017 In March, the SBDC youth group were selected to take part in the London platform for U.Dance 2017. This was an exciting opportunity for our young dancers to perform at the Laban Theatre, hone their dance skills by taking professional dance workshops and to meet and work with other young dancers from across the genres.

Sujata Banerjee nominated for One Dance UK Lifetime Achievement Award In June 2017, Sujata Banerjee was announced as one of 3 finalists for the Lifetime Achievement Award of the One Dance Teaching Awards. The inaugural awards saw nearly 900 nominations across 9 categories - submitted by pupils, parents, colleagues and friends. Three nominees in each category were shortlisted by a panel of industry professionals. The panel comprised Geoff Barton, Althea Efunshile (CBE), Linda Jasper (MBE), Carolyn Lappin and Piali Ray (OBE). This nomination followed on from an Honorary Life Membership award from People Dancing at the end of 2016, highlighting a growing recognition of the incredible impact that Sujata Banerjee's work has had in the dance world.



Jaina Modasia wins NAVADAL 2017 In July, 17-25 solo category, Performing *In Akbar's Palace*, choreographed by Sujata Banerjee. Held at the Birmingham Hippodrome, NAVADAL, meaning 'new shoots', is Akademi's National South Asian Youth Dance Competition, presenting an opportunity to see exciting new work from the rising stars of Dance.

Immersive and Intensive Kathak Residency - Summer (26th July - 5th August) Late July saw the return of the intensive Kathak residency, with a huge range of sessions planned over more than a week. The residency is designed to provide dancers with an immersive experience akin to attending a full-time dance conservatoire. The sessions explore various aspects of Kathak, such as technique, Padhant (recitation) and Abhinaya (expression). Weekend days started at 6am with yoga or Kathak Riyaz (disciplined rigorous training practice). During the residency, experts from different disciplines delivered master classes, including a 2 hour yoga session by Liz Lark, a session on dance history from Chitra Sundaram, Hindi language and dialect with Mira Kaushik, a Contemporary workshop lead by Elisabetta Adola and Hindustani vocal technique lead by Krishna Chakraborty. Musicians also accompanied most dance sessions. The participants all felt that they benefited hugely from such an intensive experience and the picture (right) attests to the positive energy it generated!



Chitrangada SBDC collaborated with Moksha Music, a Manchester-based Company, to create the dance-drama Chitrangada, based on the work originally written and composed by the Nobel Prize winner, Rabindranath Tagore. The production was directed and choreographed by Sujata Banerjee, performed mainly by SBDC dancers and produced by Rishi Banerjee of Moksha. It was performed in Stockport and London, as a part of the Season of Bangla Drama festival. "It was amazing to see Jaina playing the main role, the warrior princess, without knowing the language how well she handled the role" - Sujata Banerjee

Sonia Chandaria-Tillu wins Kalashram Kathak Competition (KKC), London - Initiated by Kalashram (the institution of Kathak maestro Padmavibhusan Pandit Birju Maharaj), this competition aims to provide a platform for young, up and coming Kathak dancers to showcase their talent. In 2017 the contest took place in London and 7 cities in India - Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Lucknow, Ahmedabad and Guwahati. London was the only international city that hosted the competition and was part of the Hemantika festival. All SBDC contestants did incredibly well and congratulations go to Sonia, who came first in the senior category, opening up an amazing opportunity for her to take part in the grand final at the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai. In this performance Sonia did extremely well to perform in front of the legendary judges and went through various rounds to get to top fours.

SBDC HEMANTIKA FESTIVAL 2017

"The performance of Maharajji was marked by naturalism, playfulness and majesty" Pulse Connects, Winter 2017



Pt. Birju Maharaj – Hemantika London 2017
Photo credit: Simon Richardson

Most of you will be well aware that last year's Hemantika Festival was bigger and better than ever, the highlight being of course, the presence of living Kathak legend Pandit Birju Maharaj. The festival ran from the 9th to the 12th of November in Barcelona and then continued in London from the 13th through to the 20th. The packed programme included workshops, masterclasses, performances, an audience with Pandit Birju Maharaj and the European leg of the Kalashram Kathak Competition. SBDC dancers performed in both Barcelona and London and participated in the masterclasses and workshops. The Festival finale featured performances by Pandit Birju Maharaj and other notable Kathak exponents: Saswati Sen, Fasih Ur Rehman and Sujata Banerjee, whose performance, reviewed in Pulse Connects, was described as an “engrossing solo depicting the attempted disrobing of Draupadi”. This year's festival built on the success of last year's inaugural event and was so well received by participants, performers and audiences alike, that as concluded in Pulse Connects: “...only 2 years in [it] can only grow from such promising beginnings”.



Sujata Banerjee as Draupadi, Hemantika Festival, London 2017.
Photo credit: Simon Richardson

Education and Community Engaging with the education sector and taking our work out to the community, has always been a strong strand of SBDC's work, since Sujata Banerjee first came to the UK in the early 1980s. Now this work is increasingly taken on by the Company dancers after training and mentoring from Sujata in workshop leadership. Two examples of projects from last year are the Hastings Storytelling Festival, produced by 18 Hours Events and school workshops with Canterbury-based Music for Change. Great feedback was received from both projects:

Everyone – children and adults alike – were enthralled by Jaina's skills, as a performer and teacher. To see our children, with no prior experience, engage so enthusiastically and perform with such commitment and enjoyment after so little time, was magical. In particular, the workshops managed to capture the imagination of less physically and socially confident children. Thank you, Jaina!
Ethelbert Road School feedback from Music for Change project

It was fun learning about the Indian dance culture and I can now perform an Indian dance.

Really good and fun dance workshop with children.

Hastings Storytelling Festival Participant

And finally a note from SBDC Chair of Trustees Glenn Sharp

As part of my role at our Ofsted rated 'outstanding' school, I have organised many themed events, especially in the areas of Creative Arts, Primary Languages and Cultural Awareness. It was in this capacity that I was lucky enough to have met Sujata Banerjee, over a decade ago, when she delivered some highly memorable Kathak dance workshops and performances with our children. I was honoured to have been asked to become Chairman of SBDC some years back and have seen it grow from strength to strength under Sujata's guidance, care and high levels of creativity and expertise across a range of areas.



SBDC Hemantika Festival 2017. Photo credit: Simon Richardson

Sujata Banerjee Dance Company www.sbdc-kathak.com
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