

PRESTON



YOUTH  
DANCE  
CO



**A CASE STUDY: OUR JOURNEY SO FAR...**

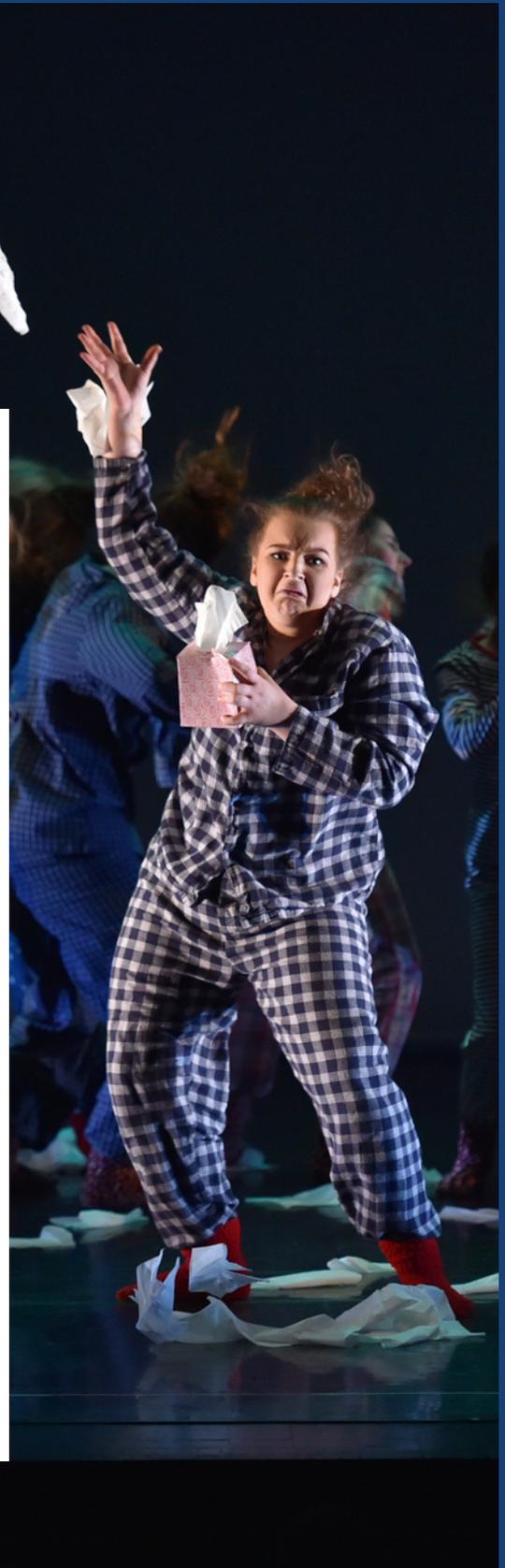
# PRESTON YOUTH DANCE COMPANY

## WHO ARE WE?

Preston Youth Dance Company, first established in 2012, are a performance company aged 11 – 19 years, consisting of talented dancers from across Preston and the surrounding areas. Dancers create high quality choreographic work in a collaborative way, injecting their own unique personalities, styles and experiences to make genuine and relatable performance work for their audiences. Our approach enables the Company to be a voice for Youth and the Arts in our area, empowering them to tell their story!

Different to a regular dance class, Preston Youth Dance Company mirrors a professional rehearsal and performance environment, meeting weekly to take part in technique class, be immersed in creative processes, take ownership of rehearsal and development and preparing and taking their performance work to a range of platforms locally and regionally.

Preston Youth Dance Company is proud to be a Resident Company of UCLan Dance, based at the University of Central Lancashire.





# PART OF THE BLUE MOOSE DANCE COMPANY FAMILY

Preston Youth Dance Company is delivered and managed by Blue Moose Dance Company.

Blue Moose Dance Company is all about empowering people to discover new potential, develop expression, gain confidence and celebrate themselves and their community.

Blue Moose Dance was originally founded by experienced Dance Artists Sarah Hall and Zanna Dennis, combining 20 years of experience managing and delivering empowering community dance provision across the North of England. Blue Moose Dance Company works inclusively with and for the benefit of all communities, irrespective of age, gender or background, with a particular emphasis on supporting the development of young people and uniting communities across Lancashire and North Yorkshire.

Sarah has been managing and delivering Preston Youth Dance Company since its beginnings in 2012. Sarah was a member of a Youth Dance Company in her early years prior to her undergraduate training and, once returning to Preston, was keen to reignite Youth Dance provision in the area.

Sarah has extensive experience delivering creative dance sessions for young people, alongside producing youth-relevant, exciting, choreographic work, which always involves the young dancers' creative ideas, design and development.

Sarah's passion is empowering young people to share their own voice through dance, using the company as an opportunity to develop confidence, curiosity, creativity and strong communication skills in those she works with.

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# COMPANY STRUCTURE

## AUDITION AND SELECTION

The dancers are selected through an annual audition in July ready for the following academic year. The audition takes the format of a technique class including a series of creative tasks and sharings. No advance preparation is needed. Everyone that registers a place is able to attend the audition and we strive to be open and inclusive throughout the process. The audition is observed by 3-5 members of a 'panel' (although we would prefer to think of these people as fans and supporters!) These are made up of Company Director, Assistant/s, ex-company members and external Dance Artists from the local area. Dancers are either offered a place in the Company, placed on a reserve list in the event that other dancers cannot accept their place or leave during the year, or are not accepted on this occasion. All dancers are given written feedback based on the notes from the panel. Every year to date, we have taken at least one dancer from the reserve list at some point during the year. We have also had dancers who were unsuccessful return the following year and gain a place.

Dancers remain with the Company for one academic year and are invited to re-audition the following year if they wish to remain in the company. This ensures we can make each audition fair and give new dancers a chance to gain a place, however, all existing dancers who re-audition nearly always regain their place. Many dancers remain with us for as long as they can within the age bracket, or until they move on to university or formal dance training at 16 or 18.

Each year we hold a 2nd audition in September exclusively for students on the BA (Hons) Dance Performance and Teaching degree at the University of Central Lancashire, reserving 1-3 places for these dancers. One of these successful dancers moves on to the Assistant role at the end of their performing year, remaining in that role for two years.



# COMPANY STRUCTURE



## LEADERSHIP AND DELIVERY

Preston Youth Dance Company is led by one Company Director, supported by two voluntary Company Assistants who support the company whilst developing their own skills. The Company Director plans and delivers the majority of class content, with Company Assistants supporting through a wealth of other delivery options based on their individual training needs, including but not limited to: delivering technique exercises, teaching repertoire, providing 1:1 support for dancers, collaborative planning with the Company Director, developing creative tasks, observing and reflecting on progress, rehearsal direction, developing lighting plans for performance work, costume design and the management of a Youth Board.

## YOUTH BOARD

To ensure we can give autonomy to the dancers and include their voice in the content and development of the Company, we also have a Youth Board, made up of 5-6 members of the Company. The board is led and managed by one or both of the Company Assistants (dependent upon their particular interests and training needs) and meets once a month, separate to weekly classes. The board is selected through open application and based on dancer interest, aiming to get a good mix of ages and experience.

The youth board discuss and decide the following, feeding back to the Company Director and calling a vote with all Company dancers when appropriate: performance opportunities, socials and fun activities, fundraising ideas, project ideas, class content and structure. It also provides a space to raise any issues, concerns or changes they wish to see made, providing a platform for reflecting on these and sharing with others before taking action.



# CONTENT

## YOUTH LED

The dancers have a huge input in the content of sessions, with most choreographic work being made through creative tasks and improvisation, guided by the Company Director but rooted in the dancers' interests and varying movement styles. One main strength of the Company is that all dancers are different ages and come to us from different backgrounds and with a range of movement vocabulary and interests, producing a rich foundation to work from. All dancers are celebrated for their individualism and we aim to highlight their strengths, whilst also uniting as a community.



## PERFORMANCE WORK

Performance work tends to come under two main categories, although always has the potential to reach into other areas aswell:

### Issue Based

All choreographic work begins with a discussion with the dancers about what is important and relevant to them. Sometimes this is light-hearted and playful, sometimes this is rooted in a key issue or topic they want to explore, either way, our work aims to say something but often using humour to help portray that message!

### Outdoor Site-specific

We often make work in the great outdoors and really enjoy sharing our performance work with the unsuspecting general public. Dancers respond well to the challenge of making and performing for outdoor work and we use the sites as our inspiration for original choreography.

Preston Youth Dance have also worked with film, often in the outdoors, to create ScreenDance. Also, as a result of classes moving online due to the coronavirus pandemic, we were able to embrace the challenge of digital performance shifting and adapting to how choreography is made for and showcased in a digital format.



# ACHIEVEMENTS



## UDANCE

The Company apply for UDance Northwest each year and have been successful in gaining a place at the event, held at The Lowry, Salford, 5 out of 6 years. In 2016, the Company were selected from the regional event to represent the Northwest at the UDance National Festival, a huge honour and an incredible experience for the young people involved. The Company performed their piece 'Infectious' alongside talented dancers from across England and took part in inspiring workshops over the 4 day event.

## SCHOOLS TOUR

In the 2016/2017 Company year, we were successful in gaining funding from the Comic Relief Local Communities Fund to create and tour a new performance piece based on positive body image, alongside a workshop delivered by the Company dancers to other young people. The process of devising this piece, alongside research and development and developing an educational workshop package to help young people learn more was an incredible learning curve for the dancers and also allowed them to take their advocacy and leadership skills to the next level. In 2017 we received additional funding through the Lancashire Community Investment Fund for a second tour around schools and local organisations, reaching almost 1000 young people in total.

## UCLAN DANCE: IN RESIDENCE

In 2018, we became one of three In Residence Companies with UCLanDance. We are able to base our sessions in the wonderful studios at the Media Factory, UCLan, and work closely with the Dance team to provide exciting opportunities for our Dancers and their students. This has been a great step forward for us and allowed us to be recognised as leaders in our field, nurturing young dance talent and guiding future Artists in community dance.



# WHAT THE DANCERS SAY...



"My highlight at PYDC has to be creative processes, the company is so unique in the way that it values ideas from everyone and encourages creativity"  
- Company Dance for 1 year

"PYDC has helped me realise that difference is okay and that being you is what matters most. It's not all about straight legs and high kicks. Creating art that fits you is so much more important"  
- Company Dance for 4 years

"PYDC was and still does feel like family"  
- Company Dance for 3 years

"Incredible. Emotional. Strengthening. Challenging. Everything I wanted in a company"  
- Company Dance for 4 years

"After the audition I felt like something had clicked. I felt like the movement was suited to what I could do with my body at that moment unlike other genres of dance I'd experienced. On reflection now...I felt a lot of pressure to conform to body image and body type norms (in both everyday life and dance) so then being introduced to contemporary when it was 'it doesn't matter how high your leg is' or 'she can lift this person' or 'be silly' etc. made me feel like I was in a safe space, even when I was trying something new"  
- Company Dance for 3 years



# WHAT THE DANCERS SAY...

"It was/is an incredible gateway into the arts, youth dance and community without feeling too much for a young brain to cope with. It is an encouraging, open, and highly creative community"

- Company Dance for 3 years

"Thank you for giving me the confidence to dance how I want to express myself as well as making me more confident as an individual"

- Company Dance for 3 years

"I enjoyed the way it became one big family, Thursdays soon became my favourite days, it was good that we had that banter in sessions as well as being able to create work at the same time"

- Company Dance for 4 years

"We were given space to really understand and explore choreography, enabling us to become empowered by our own work. The creative side to the class really developed my idea of what dance could be and that I could be more and weird and wonderful!"

- Company Dance for 3 years

"I enjoy everything about PYDC, especially the connection between every member of the company and feeling like a family. Also how creative and unique the company is to others I have seen, each piece we create is so special in its own way and I love how I can just be myself at all times when I am there.

- Company Dance for 6 years



# CONTACT US

Have some questions? Want to know more?  
We'd love to chat with you!

Sarah Hall

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Blue Moose Dance Company CIC  
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