

INTERVIEW: MARK SMITH - DEAF MAN DANCING

FRIDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2014 BY CARMEL SMITH



Choreographer Mark Smith is a movement director, dance teacher and workshop leader. In 2010 he bought together a group of dancers who, like him are deaf, to form Deaf Men Dancing (now DMD+ – he has plans to add women dancers) and they have since developed a unique choreographic language. Their latest show *Hear! Hear!* promises to be a fascinating insight...

Tell us about *Hear! Hear!*, which you'll be presenting as part of the =dance season at Sadler's Wells later this month...

Hear, Hear! explores the experience of being deaf – through the DMD+ company members' own experiences. It will allow the audience to feel what it is like to be deaf, taking them on a journey through the silent world – the discovery of new sounds, hearing aids, communication, sign-language, tinnitus and the acceptance of being deaf.

NEWS

REVIEWS

INTERVIEWS

FEATURES

WHAT'S ON

SEARCH FOR:

Any events

NEAR: EG. EC1R 4TN

London

BETWEEN:

Feb 02 2015

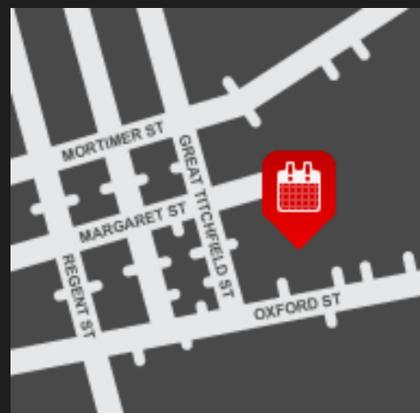
AND:

Feb 09 2015

All Categories

SUBMIT

DANCE MAP



JOIN US

Sign up for email updates from dance venues & companies, special offers, updates on new site features & to access our noticeboard, jobs & auditions.

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS:

GO

TANGO
Fire

Win a holiday
to Buenos Aires

27 Jan - 14 Feb
THE PEACOCK

MOVE IT

13-15 FEBRUARY
OLYMPIA, LONDON

WHAT'S ON & BUY TICKETS >

MOVE IT

13-15 FEBRUARY
OLYMPIA, LONDON

WHAT'S ON & BUY TICKETS >



The music (by **Deafboyone** and composer **Michael England**) has been 'modulated', so the hearing audience can experience what it's like to only hear part of it. We'll also be using the spoken word. Some of **Shakespeare's** monologues will be translated into modern English, then into British Sign Language and finally translated into Sign-Movement that will then be incorporated into the choreography.

It's very common for deaf people to suffer with tinnitus; it can stop you being able to function properly in everyday life. Through the show the audience will hear and experience what it's like. But there's lots of humour too; we make serious points in an entertaining way! I've drawn on childhood memories of wearing a constrictive harnessed hearing aid box – the dancers will be wearing them. It's a powerful image and statement about being deaf. I think it will have a humorous look, as well as making a serious point and also making it something sexy!

How did the collaboration with Deafboyone come about?

We discovered each other through LinkedIn. **Pete Waller** (aka **Deafboyone**) contacted me to say that he liked my work after seeing DMD on Youtube. I listened to his music on his website and found his songs really interesting, different to what I normally would listen to – and it included a song that used uncomfortable sounds of tinnitus. I understood where he's coming from and couldn't miss the opportunity to explore my choreography with his music.

I didn't want to use well-know recording artists for *Hear, Hear!* because the audience will already have fixed images of the songs having seen the artists' video and performances. Deafboyone kindly gave me the permission to use his songs and they became part of the creative development of the piece. It's an honour to use his music and to present it to the public for the first time. We still haven't met but we communicate by email..

You're also working with composer Michael England, who used your hearing test graphic chart...

I always get asked how much I can hear music and what sounds I cannot hear. It's hard to describe. If you listen to music with your head under water, that's the closest to my experience. I hear very well on low to middle range frequencies, but I can't hear high sounds like birds singing, tree leaves rattling or water dripping from a tap.

I gave Michael my hospital hearing test graphic chart. Michael composed his music using instruments in the middle and low registers that I can hear easily, and it particularly features rhythm and percussion instruments. He's also using higher frequencies and then at times audibly removing those higher frequencies from the music that I can't hear, to try and give a hearing person the sense of what it is I'm actually hearing.

MOVE IT

13-15 FEBRUARY
OLYMPIA, LONDON

[WHAT'S ON & BUY TICKETS >](#)

TANGO
Fire

Win a holiday
to Buenos Aires

27 Jan - 14 Feb
THE PEACOCK

TANGO
Fire

Win a holiday
to Buenos Aires

27 Jan - 14 Feb
THE PEACOCK

FOLLOW US

Keep in touch with us online

 FACEBOOK

 TWITTER

 SUBSCRIBE TO OUR RSS



Act One uses deafboyone's pop songs about his deafness and tinnitus. I wanted the music in Act Two to be completely different – and I wanted the hearing audience to have the 'deaf experience' while listening to the music.

Tell us about **Caroline Parker** and why she's such an inspiration...

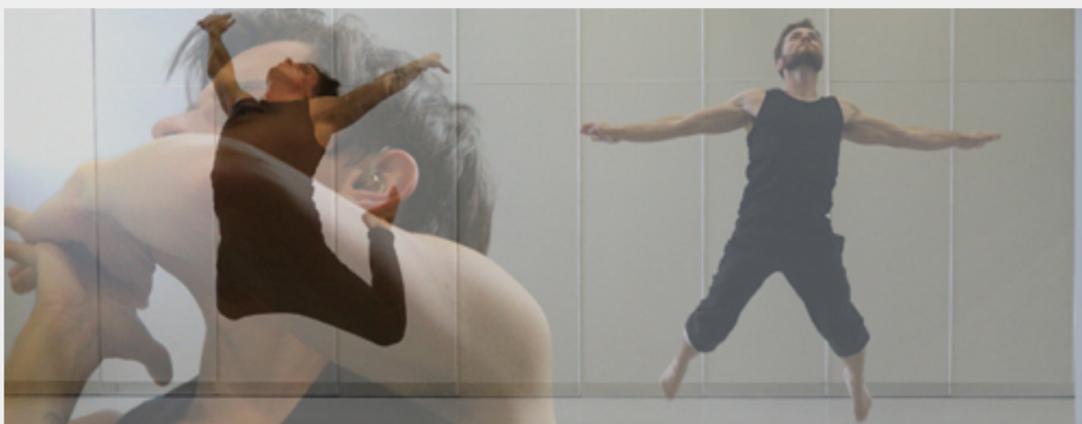
Caroline Parker is a deaf actress & sign-song performer. She has appeared in many plays, TV and films and she performed at the Paralympic Games Opening Ceremony in 2012 signing *I am What I Am*, with **Beverly Knight** singing.

In her cabaret act **Sign Songs** she performs well known recorded songs in her own style using dance, mime and sign language. I first saw her in a cabaret show in Brighton (and I was also involved in the Paralympic Opening Ceremony as a choreographer). I was in awe and captivated by her performance. Not only she is signing to the songs, she delivered storyline, images and imagination. The way that she incorporated sign-language into her performance inspired me to use sign-language in dance.

Developing *Hear, Hear!* I felt ready to move onto a new level by incorporating Caroline's style of signing into my choreography. Her style adds emotion and drama into my choreography – and I wanted to celebrate her work. She was awarded the MBE in 2013 for her services to Deaf Theatre and Drama.

How did you first get in to dance?

I wasn't diagnosed as deaf until I was four, and shortly after being fitted with my first hearing aids, my mother used to take my older sister to dancing school and I went along with them. I became fascinated and was in awe when watching a ballet class. Through my new hearing aids box (worn on my chest with straps) I could suddenly hear the piano, as well as feeling the vibration from the floor. It dawned on me they were moving in time to the music. It was like a whole world opening up I've found a way to express myself through dancing to the music! I sneaked in and tried to copy the dance at the back of the class. A dance teacher noticed me and asked my mother if I would like to join the dancing school. That's how I got into dance. I was accepted into the **Royal Ballet's Junior Associates** when I was ten, and when I left school I went to **London Studio Centre** and trained for three years. That's how I got into dance.



I grew up watch MGM Musical films like *Singing in the Rain* and *Sweet Charity*. My childhood dance idols were **Gene Kelly**, **Fred Astaire**, **Cyd Charisse**, **Ann Miller** and **Eleanor Powell**. When I was a teenager, I used to love **Arlene Phillips'** dance group **Hot Gossip** and pop stars who had their own style of dancing like **Toni Basil**, **Madonna**, **Janet Jackson**, **Prince** and

Iggy Pop. When I was training at the Royal Ballet School, I loved **Rudolf Nureyev**, **Fiona Chadwick** and **Sylvie Guillem**. The first time I discovered contemporary was watching **Michael Clark** dancing with punk band **The Fall** on TV. It changed my view of dance and inspired me to explore contemporary dance. Choreographers who inspired me include **Bob Fosse**, **Matthew Bourne**, **Michael Clark**, **Mats Ek**, **Jerome Robbins** and **Twyla Tharp**.

So dance has always been an important part of your life?

Yes, because of my hearing impairment and limited vocabulary, it helped me express myself and set me free through dancing. Because of my late diagnosis I started to learn to speak through speech therapy, but dance helped me to communicate. That's why I incorporated sign-language into my choreography because it helps me to express myself and communicate to the audience about my work. Also I want to celebrate the beauty and poetry of sign-language. Dance and sign-language is a perfect combination because dance is about communication.

You say you want to “inspire more deaf and disabled people to love dance!”. That suggests there's room for improvement...

We've still got a long way to go to make dance accessible for deaf and disabled people, but I feel it's getting better and has improved in the last ten years. There are some amazing UK based deaf and disabled artists and companies around, like **Marc Brew**, **Caroline Bowditch**, **Chisato Miniamimura**, **Claire Cunningham**, **Stop Gap** and **Candoco**. I hope there will be more emerging.

Sadler's Wells' year long programme **Dance** is a wonderful opportunity for deaf and disabled artists/companies to showcase their work to audiences with an interest in dance, but who aren't familiar with deaf and disabled dance. And the same applies to deaf and disabled audiences who are not familiar with dance and want to learn more about it. It's my dream to integrated deaf and dance together. I want to build a bridge...

What's next?

DMD+ recently performed a new outdoor production called **TEN** at National Paralympic Day in the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival and we've got interest from other festivals for next year.

I would like to continue to develop *Hear, Hear!* and expand it into a full dance production. I'd also like to work with female deaf dancers who will join the company (currently **Anthony Snowden**, **Denny Haywood**, **Kevin Jewell** and **Joseph Fletcher**). That's why I've re-named Deaf Men Dancing as DMD+ !

DMD+ *Hear! Hear!*

28 September, Lilian Baylis Studio, Sadler's Wells

www.sadlerswells.com

Part of the =dance season, which also includes performances by **Candoco** and **Magpie Dance Company**. [More details](#)

Photos: Roy Tan

[◀ RETURN TO INTERVIEWS](#)

 **SHARE**

LEAVE A COMMENT

You must be signed in to post comments.

[Sign in now](#)

