

Public Engagement Case Study: Life Class

Local dancers have taken centre stage in an innovative performance exploring how our lives are shaped by our experiences and the people we encounter. Performed at Lancashire Encounter Festival 2021, *Life Class* is both a show that invites the audience to reflect on their own life trajectories and a remarkable collaborative community arts project from immersive theatre company *Bodies in Flight*.

From the very first stages of development, *Life Class* has been driven by community involvement. Sara Giddens, Reader in Choreographic Practices, works closely with older members of tea dance groups, and their experiences of past encounters at social dances informs and shapes the choreography and informs the accompanying soundtrack.

Performances in Preston featured senior social dancers from Fever Dance Company. The music was developed by Jon Aveyard, Senior Lecturer in Music and Audio Art, and performed by Preston People's Choir. Community engagement with the work doesn't end with the performers – each show ends with a dance that audience members are invited to join in with.

Jon said: "I was very pleased to be invited to take part in Life Class. Having initially been a liaison between the Bodies in Flight and Preston People's Choir, I was later asked to complete the music composition work. In this role I had an active part in the devising process and experienced the considered, collaborative way in which Bodies in Flight worked with the actors as well as the accommodating, encouraging approach that was taken when working with the dancers and singers from the community groups."

Bodies in Flight are planning on expanding the project and taking *Life Class* to Blackpool Tower Ballroom later this year.

Sara says: "Our forthcoming exhibition in PR1 Gallery (1st-8th March) will premiere the Lancashire Encounter *Life Class* video as part of our exhibition *Flesh & Text*. *Flesh & Text* is a monument to our three decades in the limelight, encompassing performances which have variously challenged the traditional boundaries of live theatre, made searing political statements, and frequently transformed members of the public into the stars of the show. By working closely with communities from all over the world and staging events in unique and unusual environments, no two shows are ever the same. Bringing *Life Class* to Preston last year - our first live performance since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic - was fantastic. I found it truly wonderful to be back in a space making work with people face to face."

You can watch the show from the Lancashire Encounter Festival 2021 here:

<https://youtu.be/kPKKLwTw-Bo>

Private view of the *Flesh & Text* exhibition will take place on Thursday 3rd March at 16:00 in PR1 gallery (PR17HD).

To book a place for this event please contact sbarrowdance@outlook.com