

A male dancer is captured in a dynamic pose, performing a pointe move. He is wearing a white, angular, geometric mask that covers his eyes and nose, leaving only his mouth open. He is shirtless, wearing black suspenders over dark, cropped trousers. His right leg is extended upwards, and his left leg is bent at the knee, with his foot on the tip of his right foot. His arms are raised, with one hand near his head and the other extended outwards. The background is a plain, light grey color, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the dancer's musculature and the texture of his clothing.

EN POINTE

The British Ballet Organisation marks an era of innovation as it relocates to Battersea under three newly appointed artistic directors

Words MADELEINE HOWELL

The launch party at the new home of British ballet in Ensign House at Battersea Reach saw the great and the good of ballet come together to congratulate the new artistic directors – William Trevitt, Michael Nunn, and Kerry Whelan – on their new tenure. Ballet stars Darcey Bussell, Tamara Rojo and Agnes Oakes were out in force to celebrate the move and to embrace a period of modernisation for bbodance, or the British Ballet Organisation, as it was formerly known.

The trio of directors are famed for founding the pioneering BalletBoyz, and have themselves enjoyed illustrious careers as ballet dancers at the Royal Ballet School and the Royal Opera House. Trevitt and Nunn have worked together for over 30 years, and have both been honoured with OBEs for their services to dance.

After all that time, what makes them tick? ‘We loved the classics, like *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*,’ Trevitt tells me, ‘but we really enjoyed creating new choreography. That’s why we started our own company, BalletBoyz, commissioning new work. It’s contemporary, but it still employs a classical vocabulary as a starting point. It veers towards theatre and dance drama, rather than being abstract.

‘There’s still an audience for classical ballet, but also an appetite to experiment,’ he continues. ‘There’s a pull in two directions. One to ensure the classics are preserved – the equivalent of looking after the Old Masters at the National Gallery – but also a desire to be modern and engage with the latest ideas. The challenge is how to accommodate both.’

At this point, I feel obliged to admit that I don’t actually know that much about ballet myself, but that doesn’t seem to worry Trevitt.

‘You’re our perfect audience,’ he insists. ‘I like to think that if you’re going to take a risk and buy a ticket to see some dance, but don’t know a great deal about it, we’re the best place to start.’ Their

latest two act show, *Life*, opened earlier this year at Sadler’s Wells and, after a stint in Malta, will be back touring the UK in the autumn.

Trevitt’s new role at bbodance will involve training up the next generation of ballet dancers, and the philosophy behind BalletBoyz will feed into that. ‘We believe that the more versatile, the better,’ he explains. ‘Disciplines from classical ballet can still feed into musical theatre and cross-fertilise. Creativity and fun are the two things we want to emphasise the most.



Disciplines from both classical ballet and musical theatre will complement each other

Ballet stars Darcey Bussell and Agnes Oakes attended the launch party

It's not enough to just be a body learning to dance – you've got to involve yourself.'

The organisation itself is a qualification network, offering exams for young, aspiring dancers, as well as teacher training. 'It offers a technical, tough regime and real vocational training, but it's also good fun. It could be that you just love to dance in the evenings,' says Trevitt, who will be implementing a new musical theatre syllabus to the traditional programme, and who views ballet across the UK as a thriving art form. 'The appetite for ballet is really growing,' he says. 'I've heard rumours that there are more boys auditioning for ballet schools than girls, which is extraordinary. Nobody would have believed it ten years ago. It's more accessible now, and there's a better understanding of how athletic and physical dance can be.'

Trevitt himself is passionate about dance, and speaks fondly of his own time in principal roles on the stage. 'You have to put the hours in, the scales and the prep, day in and day out. If the stars align and you have the right physique, the right temperament, and you're not injured, then when your opportunity comes, you can



Kerry Whelan, one of the three new directors



seize it.' He was inspired by Gene Kelly, a 'versatile' dancer, and – of course – Nureyev. In terms of choreographers, he cites Akram Khan and Russell Maliphant as admirable talents.

Now he is preparing inspire the next generation – and ballet is set to have a growing presence in South West London, with bbodance also set to offer courses to teenagers in the area. 'It's a fantastic location right on the river front, with wonderful studios,' he enthuses. 'There's a vibrant community at Battersea Reach, which is growing fast.' Now's the time to put on your dancing shoes.

To find out more or to enrol your child call 020 8748 1241 or email info@bbo.dance



The trio of artistic directors founded the contemporary ballet company BallefBoyz