



Into Contact with Dance and Sport

A Connections project funded by Legacy Trust UK
and managed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland



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Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company

Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company is recognised as Northern Ireland's leading Dance Company. It was created by Ursula Laebli and Steve Batts in Amsterdam in 1991 and after six years of project work in Europe it relocated to Derry, Northern Ireland where it has since become a key influence in the development of dance theatre in Ireland.

Echo Echo's team of staff, artists and volunteers has flourished in recent years, generating a diverse and exciting programme of education and performance work.

Echo Echo regularly produces and tours internationally with original new performance work for an ensemble of local and international dancers. The company also has a strong commitment to developing dance as an accessible art form maintaining a busy dance education and outreach programme for people of all ages and abilities.

It is the company's movement style and ethos that sets it apart from the crowd with influences ranging from the quirky and playful to gentle and poetic, sourcing its movement material from a very wide range of contemporary dance forms and movement practices.

Image by David McClelland.



into contact

echoecho dance theatre company

Connections

Connecting Cultures: Inspiring Excellence

Connections is Legacy Trust UK's programme for Northern Ireland. The programme aspires to reach out to and connect with disparate cultural elements, connecting cultures and inspiring excellence across and between art and sport, prioritising engagement and forming new partnerships with all communities in Northern Ireland.

Connections has been funded by Legacy Trust UK, an independent charity set up to help build a cultural and sporting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The £1.78 million programme will leave a lasting legacy in Northern Ireland. From now until 2012, Connections will be delivered by six lead partner organisations including Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company.

The Connections programme is managed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Into Contact

As a lead partner of the Connections programme, Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company will run its project Into Contact with Dance and Sport over three years in the build up to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The mission of this project is to deliver an innovative public programme of arts and sport events that will bring people into contact, create and develop cultural partnerships, demonstrate excellence in contemporary dance and sport, and leave a lasting legacy for people in Northern Ireland.

Into Contact Programme

Into Contact will develop and deliver an outstanding programme of sport themed dance events in partnership with high calibre partner organisations in Northern Ireland, emphasising the skill, beauty and magic of dance and sport.

The **performance strand** will focus on sports with less exposure offering the chance for these activities to gain a higher profile. A series of inspirational site-specific performance events is currently in development linking dance with sports and games including climbing, chess and Olympic sports.

The Chess Piece production has been granted the prestigious Inspire Mark, which recognises exceptional and innovative projects inspired by the London 2012 Games.

The **education strand** of the project will focus on the position of dance as a Physical Education element of the Revised Curriculum. It aims to improve dance skills development opportunities for teachers and facilitators; and promote creativity, health and well being benefits of dance for young people and in schools.

The **audience development strand** will deliver increased participation, profile and awareness through a series of high quality workshop programmes and master classes.

The **Into Contact** project will launch in April 2010 and programme activities will run over three years to autumn 2012.

How Into Contact will leave a lasting legacy

Echo Echo's Into Contact three-year programme will leave a lasting legacy for people in Northern Ireland by:

- Providing unique, stimulating and memorable cultural experiences
- Encouraging and inspiring ongoing participation in dance and sport
- Developing lasting partnerships and collaborations between organisations
- Contributing to the relevance and importance of dance in the Revised Curriculum
- Increasing the profile of contemporary dance and sport in Northern Ireland
- Enhancing the reputation for excellence of Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company, and contributing to it's future stability

Introduction

By Artistic Director of Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company

I have always loved sport. A large part of my becoming interested in dance in my early twenties was to do with the pleasure in moving which I experienced playing rugby, squash, running and kayaking.

Of course it is easy to see the connections between sport and dance. They share a common focus on movement. I went to my first contemporary dance class out of curiosity and I quickly discovered that it was here I would find the connection between my interests in theatre, music and my passion for sport. I realised that my drive to move was primarily poetic.

The cliché "*Poetry in motion*" is used to refer to the elegance of an athlete, but for most sports people this poetry is the secondary result of a focused practice aimed at functional success. The poetry is not the primary aim, though it may be the most pleasurable outcome. For a dancer the primary attention is poetic.

We have chosen to approach our programme by looking at sport and the Olympic Games from a side-on point of view influenced by our poetic interest in movement.

We are creating work through research into, and inspiration from, Chess and Rock Climbing, and

we are producing a mixed event of a collection of smaller pieces of work inspired by memories of the Olympics. You may ask: In what way are Chess or Rock Climbing sports?

Chess is the sport of the mind or intellect, but its physicality is on the smallest scale. In that way it is unlike what we usually think of as sport. The movement experienced by a Chess player is primarily the movement of the mind. The intensity of the patterns, dynamics, emotions and strategies are perceived within the private experience of the player. They are barely represented in the movement of the pieces on the board.

Our first Legacy Trust UK project will be a performance in which the rhythms, forms and passions of a particular chess game are embodied on a huge chessboard in Derry Guildhall.

Rock Climbing is physically demanding and there are particular approaches to it that are organised and competitive. However many rock climbers reject the label of "*sport*" for what they do. They imagine it more as a sort of meditative, social or spiritual practice in which the element of competition is there only in relation to the self and not with other people.

In our second performance project I will be collaborating with well-known artist and skilled rock climber, Dan Shipsides. We will develop work that is at the interface of fine art and contemporary dance practice and related to the connections between the poetics of movement and vertical space, the natural environment,

fear, and the challenge of detailed physical attention under stressful circumstances.

Echo Echo's third project will directly address the Olympic Games but also from a particular angle. For most of us our experience of the Olympics is very indirect. Even people who attend the live Olympics as competitors or watchers have a very limited experience. For the vast majority of us our experience and memories are photographic, televisual, or journalistic. So in one way the Olympics itself is more an act of imagination than a real experience of material substance. What do we actually remember? What images, what moments?

We will ask eight local artists to create small works in which they address a specific, personally important, memory of the Olympics e.g. Mary Peters' gold medal, the black power salute in 1968, Bob Beamon's enormous leap, The Munich Massacre, Usain Bolt's amazing 100 metres or the films, photographs and reports of Olympic meetings before any of us were born.

We will ask the artists to approach their chosen subject with some reference to movement as an art form, to approach the subject in a personal way in which the specifics of memories and feeling are at the centre of the work, and to consider collaborating with others among the eight invited artists. In this way we will produce a portfolio of work: a collection. Some will be performance based, some installation perhaps video/film or photographic. This

collection will be our response to the complexity of the emotional impact of the Olympic Games on our lives and will be presented as the final part of our three-year programme.

Echo Echo will also operate a substantial education project focusing on engaging with schoolteachers and encouraging them to begin developing ways to include movement and dance as a central part of children's primary school experience.

Into Contact with Dance and Sport is a wonderful opportunity to approach a very specific theme, which draws us towards universal ideas and responses in a varied, critical and challenging way. We are extremely grateful for the chance to do this in a thoughtful and rather unusual way. We hope and believe that our work throughout both the artistic and outreach elements of this project will be exciting, stimulating and worthwhile.

Steve Batts
Artistic Director