



Inside Hackney: Dalston Ballet

Dalston Ballet was founded by Gar O'Dwyer, a curator, film-maker, photographer and painter behind prolific venture the House of O'Dwyer. Bored of making video portraits, he decided to venture out of the visual realm and embrace physicality. Dalston Ballet was formed, with visiting associate artists performing and playing characters conjured by Gar. One of his regular collaborators is Yumi Hara, a vocalist and multi-instrumentalist with, amongst others, The Artaud Beats, an avant rock improv band. We met up with Gar and Yumi in Hackney Wick.

Yumi 'Gar writes text for me to sing – he is a genius. My music is not pre-composed – I might play my electric harp, an African djembe drum or a honky tonky piano. I also use toy pianos and found objects. I watch the dancers as I play in order to synchronise with them. Normally dancers learn music, and then music becomes the background. I am not interested in providing accompaniment or being in the background!

We've done site-specific works, for example at Charing Cross hospital, around a Henry Moore sculpture and a Japanese pond. We do conscious cultural appropriation, in a very obvious way – it challenges us as a diverse group of artists: African, Indian, Afro American, Chinese and Japanese. We cross-appropriate, and sometimes we culturally appropriate our own culture. I myself know nothing

of traditional Japanese culture. But I appropriate it. It's so wrong it somehow becomes right!

Gar 'Some of the stories I write for Dalston Ballet are narratives, and some are more abstract. I am delving into the idea of individuality and archetypes, whether Jungian, from tarot cards or from our storytelling traditions. My archetypes include the hero, the dark lord, the princess, the artist as hero and the witch.

Often I'm in the piece filming it, like a crazy drone. Because I can't afford a drone! The materials generated from our performances – film and photographs – become part of our art, and may feed back into our performances.

We have performed at venues including the Ace Hotel, Hackney Showroom and Vogue Fabrics. Each piece is different because we are never sure who will take part. I see the uncertainty like the shuffling of the tarot pack, waiting to see which characters will surface.

As well as cultural appropriation we also do gender appropriation – for example the princess archetype is played by a man. We're looking for new theatre and gallery spaces to perform in, and we'd love more people to join us. We have a professional ballet dancer in the group, but we're also interested in people who dance at clubs, and people who can't dance at all.'

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