

DCD CASE STUDY - COMPANY DANCER

Nelson Fernandez OBE



Biography

Nelson Fernandez is an arts producer and cultural facilitator with experience of working in dozens of countries throughout the world. During a long career as an artist and producer he has worked with organisations and individuals in the fields of dance, drama, and opera such as the UK's Ballet Rambert, the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Opera, the National Theatre, Nottingham Playhouse, and Dance Umbrella festival as well as Koln Tanz Forum (Germany), Louis Falco Dance Company (Italy), Rosemary Butcher and Wendy Houstoun.

In 1997, he joined Visiting Arts, a UK Government agency founded in 1977 which supports artistic exchange and intercultural dialogue between the UK and the rest of the world. As one of Visiting Arts' three directors, with responsibility for Cultural Operations, Mr Fernandez had responsibility for the development of a broad spectrum of arts management and cultural leadership programmes dealing with the visual and performing arts. He also conceptualised and produced many seminars and symposia in partnership with organisations such as British Council, the Open Society Institute, Arts Council England, Ford Foundation and many others. These programmes were delivered in many countries and regions around the world, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, India, Iran, Russia, Tanzania, Ukraine, Central Asia, all of Central and Eastern Europe, and Southern Africa. He left Visiting Arts in 2008 to set up his own consultancy firm, *NFA International Arts & Culture*.

As an independent consultant, Nelson has worked with a variety of organisations including British Council; the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport; the Emirates Foundation Abu Dhabi; the Southbank Centre London; the Virasat Foundation in Rajasthan; the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games; the Victoria & Albert Museum London; the Edinburgh International Festival;



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Arts Council England's Sustained Theatre initiative; the UK's National Youth Theatre; and Relais Culture Europe. He is Scottish Dance Theatre's International Producer since 2009.

Nelson is a regular speaker at seminars, conferences, and symposia on issues relating to the arts, arts management, cultural policy and diplomacy, and intercultural dialogue. He is a Director of Brighton Festival & Dome Ltd., ATC Theatre Company, and *Theatre O*; a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and a Chevalier of France's *Ordre des Arts et Lettres*. He was awarded an OBE for services to the arts in the June 2009 Birthday Honours List.

Transition Process:

I first decided to stop dancing when I was in my early 30s in 1983. I actually stopped performing then and took a job for a year at Goldsmiths' College University of London, working as a dance teacher in a course that was being closed down. I was the course's only dance teacher and felt an enormous responsibility towards my 22 students. The opportunity to teach regularly, to be away from performance for a year, and to have such great responsibility for others was actually extremely healthy; it provided me with a mental and physical break and time to reflect about my own life and career aspirations. After my year's contract was over, I decided to go back to performance and I danced (mostly very happily) for another 10 years.

By 1993, however, I had decided that it was time to stop performing, not because I was forced to for physical reasons but because I feared the moment when I could no longer dance to the standard that I aspired to. I wanted to stop before anyone told me that I should! I also wanted to be in control of my life; as a dancer, at the end of my career, I increasingly felt at the mercy of others' whims, likes, and dislikes and I just could not take that. I also wanted to walk away from dance still loving it as I had always loved it. Lastly, I also wanted to change directions before I became too old to have another full career. I am glad I took that decision.

I was fortunate enough to have contributed to the Dancers' Resettlement Fund (as it was then known) during my years in Rambert. Peter Williams (the founder of the Fund) and Tony Dyson (its Chairman) encouraged me to apply for assistance and all the officers that were in place through the years (Margaret Lawford and Linda Yates to name but two) were always immensely supportive and encouraging.

I decided to retrain in the field of arts production and management. Truthfully, I thought I was re-training myself to become an Artistic Director – I wanted to have the production skills, arts management skills, and the understanding of how to deal with artists that I had found often lacking when I had worked in companies. Well, at the end of the day I did NOT become an Artistic Director but I realised that I had become an arts producer by default.

As I did not wish to take a long university course, I decided to retrain by taking a series of short modules on a variety of subjects – anything from arts marketing, audience development, double-entry bookkeeping (!), copy writing to a six-month course on how to develop counselling/listening skills. It was then suggested to me that a work placement(s) would be helpful and I took that



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suggestion on board and found myself placements with Jenny Mackintosh at the NT and with Ruth Mackenzie at Nottingham Playhouse. I subsequently worked for Ruth. Thanks to a Producers' Bursary from ACE I then did another full year of work placements, partly working with at Nottingham, and then with Dance Umbrella and with Marie McCluskey in Swindon Dance.

Learning from the process:

I learned a great deal about myself in the process. For me it was a frightening moment in my life but I found I had strengths that I did not know I possessed. I also was fortunate to have wonderful friends and the support of organisations like DCD and ACE and to encounter extraordinary people like Jenny McIntosh, Ruth Mackenzie, Mary Caws, and Marie McCluskey who generously helped me along the way. Do not be afraid to ask for help but think about what you may need before you do so.

Career Title(s): Arts Producer and Facilitator

Do you have multiple careers? (Please highlight the correct answer): No

This DCD re-trainee agrees to being contacted by dancers wishing to gain advice on retraining. Please contact DCD if you wish to contact Nelson personally.