

Dance frees them to fight abuse

NEW DELHI: Having grown up on Kalkaji's footpaths, Nita, 17, is no stranger to the horrors that confront a woman on Delhi's streets. The long abuse and malnourishment tell in her frame, but up on a stage at the YWCA auditorium she has full control of her life, surrounding space and body. She and 37 other sexually exploited homeless girls in the 12-22 age group are choreographing a performance in which dance and real life meet with happy consequences.

Helping the dancers are two master teachers collaborating with the Battery Dance Company (BDC) of New York. The renowned company runs an outreach programme, Dancing to Connect, to address issues of exclusion in society. On Wednesday, the choreography will be staged at FIAuditorium as a part of Catalyst Conference, a programme on sexual abuse.

"Dance is not learnt, it is created daily in our lives. If you can breathe you can dance" is Slovenian

dancer-choreographer Tadej Brdnik's philosophy for the workshop. Brdnik asks the girls, drawn from two shelter homes in the city, to interpret their names using their bodies. Some use their limbs, others twist their torsos, but one teen only moves her head and shoulders, eyes lowered. "Even in that jerky awkwardness there was dance, so we gave her a partner who did the same movements as her. It

became a choreographed awkwardness," says Brdnik.

Sanved, a Kolkata NGO that specializes in dance therapy, is collaborating with BDC on the project. The underlying philosophy of the workshops is to help the youngsters realize that they have some control over their lives and they don't have to resign themselves to abuse and humiliation. Lydia Tetzlaff, another master teacher, says the girls "show no rancour, no hesitation at all in working with each other. The level of trust and helpfulness is amazing".

The freedom from structure is a bit unsettling for the girls, who would much rather do some unbridled Bollywood moves. "There will be some frustration, some boredom, some lack of concentration and that happens everywhere. But in the end, this has to be their dance," says Brdnik.

EmancipAction, an international NGO working to end child sex-trafficking, is organizing the event. Laura Entwistle, founder & CEO, said, "We wanted to bring new people to the table-young leaders who could bring their skills and networks and resources to bear on the issue". The BDC itself will also perform on Wednesday, and dancer-activist Mallika Sarabhai will stage her acclaimed solo work 'I Am Not That Woman'.

(Names of the participating girls have been changed)

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Mallika Kauri

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MOVING TO THEIR OWN BEAT

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Soul-stirring dance show ignites action against sexual violence

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Artistes from New York's critically-acclaimed Battery Dance Company and Kolkata Sanved present a soul-stirring performance, "Dancing to Connect" organised by Ananta Aspen Centre and EmancipAction in solidarity with victims of sexual violence.

The performance featured mesmerising dances of healing and inspiration by a troupe of young girls, who have survived a myriad of hardships, including gender violence, human trafficking and homelessness.

This joint collaboration between BDC and dance therapists of Kolkata Sanved was part of BDC's renowned outreach programme, "Dancing to Connect", which has been conducted in over 40 countries over the world. The workshop aims at addressing issues of exclusion in society and women rights.

Donning colours of various hues that reflected their sense of freedom and independence, the young dancers were trained by the BDC choreographers and Kolkata Sanved to present a piece that beautifully brought out the inner and outer lives of the protagonists. The changing colours of the background expressed the deepest emotions of every young girl, everywhere in the world.

On their first visit to India since 2006, the Battery Dance Company also presented a repertoire new to the Indian audience but celebrated elsewhere around the world. Set in contemporary style, the dancers displayed a unique blend of abstract themes in modern backgrounds. In addition, the inimitable Mallika Sarabhai performed her powerful solo work, "I Am Not That Woman" in the backdrop of a haunting melody set on the celebrated Urdu poet, Momin's ghazal, "Tumhe yaad ho ki na yaad

ho" (Do you remember, or not?)

The Battery Dance Company was founded in 1976 by choreographer Jonathan Hollander, who is also the troupe's artistic director. Hollander has choreographed more than 75 works in major theatres and festivals in the U.S., Africa, Middle East, Asia and the Caribbean.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/printer-friendly-version?article_id=1140424002... 4/25/2014

Survivors of sex violence use dance therapy to heal

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Using the rhythm of dance as a potent tool to overcome, address and heal the scars of violence and abuse seems to be the new mantra to beat the demons of unpleasant memories.

Paving way for such an example is New York-based 'Battery Dance Company' that has collaborated with '[Kolkata Sanved](#)' an NGO which uses Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) to address the issue of sexual violence.

The collaboration performed on the theme of 'Dancing to Connect' here recently with 25 young survivors of sexual violence, trained by professionals of both groups.

"It was interesting that a bunch of young children who had every reason to distrust people due to the turbulent episodes they went through in their lives; instilled confidence and trust in us. The dance movements we designed for the performance were based on the inputs and narration by the young survivors," says Jonathan Hollander Artistic Director and founder, Battery Dance Company.

Seven trainers from Battery Dance Company and [Kolkata Sanved](#) trained a troupe of girls who have survived a myriad of hardships including gender violence, human trafficking and homelessness, in a matter of seven days for the performance; shares Sohini Chakraborty, founder of [Kolkata Sanved](#).

"The effort was all about instilling a sense of self esteem and dignity in the hearts of the children. While the dance performance was crucial, it was also about the behind-the-scenes, where the children form a strong bond with the ones who train them and speak their mind and heart out. The dance moves we created tell the story of each one of the survivors," says an enthusiastic Sohini.