

Dancing to Connect Brings Diverse Groups Together in Busan

By **Staff** - February 5, 2015



Last week the famous [Battery Dance Company](#) from New York hosted a dance workshop for around 100 people here in Busan. The workshop was a series of around the world workshops to promote modern dance and bring people together in non-verbal communication.

The event was hosted by several businesses here in Busan and organized by the American Embassy and American Presence Post Staff in Busan. Mr. Kim Dae-B assisted by Mr. Byung Junghwan worked tirelessly to ensure everything went to plan.

The workshops featured North Korean Defectors, under-privileged children around Busan and a group of multi-racial housewives from here in Busan.

The event started Sunday 25th January and each of the groups had their own workshop with one instructor from the Battery Dance Company. I was lucky enough to follow the Housewives as they developed their routine for the final show at the 1200 seat SoHyang Music Theatre in Centum, Busan.

To start with each person had to act out their name using any movement or gesture according to the syllables of their names. Whilst this sounds simple it was difficult to get started and further complicated by the fact that there were many different nationalities.



Amazingly, whilst many of the dancers could not remember the spoken name of the other dancers, most people can remember the actions of the name. Even a week later my wife who was one of the dancers can find the names of the others by their actions when she sees their photo!

On the second day, the instructor, Clement Mensah asked the housewives to discuss the role and stereotypical view of their role in the house. This

would be the theme for the whole week, although the housewives didn't realize it yet.

There were some fascinating responses, and stereotypical views but as the theme was dance, each person was asked to choose 6 activities during their normal days routine and act it out in a dance to an eight count.

Initially most people thought of checking their phone, brushing their hair but as the week progressed you could see a battle for more creative answers once the group formed bonds and dropped their inhibitions.

From an outsiders point of view, each and every person were clearly dancing in their 'personal space' on day one and glancing sideways to see what others were doing, they were then asked to perform this in front of everyone else. Each dancer was clearly isolated in their mind at this point.

By the afternoon however, they were paired with someone of a different background and asked to perform each others act. This was the start of the bonding process but still you could see everyone was holding back and dancing in a tightly defined personal space.

The third day the dancers were grouped together in larger groups and told to come up with a dance routine that used one element of each persons action and added a jump or turn with exaggerated movement. This was the first of the real bonding process especially as there were many different languages being spoken and verbal communication was limited.

Day by day the groups were re-formed then broken then reformed until the penultimate day when elements of each persons achievement was pulled skillfully together to create a final routine. From ordinary housewives to superstars overnight!

The final performance was in front of almost 1200 people in the beautiful Sohyang Music theatre, the first time the dancers saw the stage was about one hour before their act when they did their one rehearsal and took instruction for stage performance from the instructors and production directors.

Friday night was the final act with stage lighting and a huge stage area, TV cameras and photographer. The event was filmed by a professional film crew and will become part of a world documentary series following the Battery Dance Company as they teach groups of people around the world .

The lighting and music was expertly crafted together to produce an event beyond my imagination and I think beyond that of the performers too.

The opening was performed by the Choir with three songs that they had written themselves, one other song produced by Mira from the Battery Dance Company and a choreography of dance – a feast for the eyes.

The Battery Dance Company performed their act segments in between each of the groups with music and lights that pulled you into the act emotionally, it encompassed the passion of the human spirit, the growth, love and torture we inflict on our selves. A mind blowing performance to say the least.

The Children which comprised of North and South Korean Children from disadvantaged backgrounds followed with a stunning youthful display of dance embodying the suffering that North and South Korea have endured since the war. One solo break-dancer showed that Korea is not isolated from the west as he twisted on the floor and held himself in a single hand – handstand.

The housewives then pulled all their weeks effort together in a fantastic energetic performance with all the things they practiced over the week. Out of all the groups, this group was the only group to have many members that could not communicate verbally due to language, but watching the performance you would never realize it. Jumps, turns, pirouettes even a motorcycle imitation

using only their bodies to create the shape to the music of Basement Jaxx Take me back to your house and Billy Paul's – Me and Mrs. Jones.

Personally I have never appreciated this form of dance, possibly because I never understood the emotion behind it. After a week of watching the dancers form bonds and the awesome finale act, I am a full convert. Watching the Battery Dance Company perform modern expressive dance with music, lights and smoke is a mind-blowing experience for anyone.

The American Embassy, the dancers and the Battery Dance Company have given their permission to use the photos from the week and show them publicly. Please **like** the photos at:

www.flickr.com/photos/kabayanmark

The Battery Dance Company had four members instructing here in Busan, each of them extremely talented and ordinarily great people to meet.

Johnathan Hollander is the Artistic director and Mitchell Ost the Production Designer for which the whole performance owes its gratitude. I hope that by liking the photos they will return next year and I hope maybe you will get the chance to get involved.

Dancer / Instructors : Clement Mensah, Robin Cantrell, Mira Cook, Sean Scantlebury.