There are songs still to be sung

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Content

Preface ........................................................................................................................................... 3
Introduction....................................................................................................................................... 4
Aims................................................................................................................................................... 5
Outcomes .......................................................................................................................................... 8
Reflections......................................................................................................................................... 9

Recollections
- The Yellow Butterfly ..................................................................................................................... 11
- Wheelchair Experience .................................................................................................................. 13
- Redefining Heritage .................................................................................................................... 14

Appendices
- Dance artist, therapists and scholars I met during the Fellowship ......................................... 16
- Places I visited during the Fellowship ........................................................................................ 20
- Comments from the host organisations ....................................................................................... 21
- The inspiration for the dance, Larix Lyallii by Robert Bringhurst ............................................. 25
When my eight year old grandson, Noah, heard that I am going away for a month he wanted to know where was I going and why? I asked him if he had heard the name Churchill? He cheekily and innocently said do you mean the dog in that advert! “No” I said, I am talking about the man who at one time was the Prime Minister of England. He immediately said “Oh you mean Winston Churchill? Excitedly he shared with me a story of Winston Churchill’s wartime bravery and enquired “what has he got to do with you?” I persisted with more determination to make him get a sense of the connection between this British wartime hero and his Indian dancer grandmother. I told him that throughout his life Winston Churchill liked to inspire people, he liked people to feel strong and positive, he wanted them to believe that dreams could be realised and that his one great message was ‘deserve victory’. When he was no longer there to inspire people, in person his friends and followers set up a trust in his name that invites men and women from across the UK to tell them their aspirations for their lifetime. The Trust then helps the individuals, whose dreams in some way chime with Winston Churchill’s spirit, to make those dreams come true. I was very fortunate as this year I was chosen by the Trust to fulfil my dream of going to Canada to learn more about dance and that is why I am going to Canada. “Can I have a dream Diya?” asked Noah. “Yes of course” I said “keep looking for a special dream that you would really really like to come true.”
Introduction

As my life flows through time, flowers bloom and wilt, my thoughts on dancing keeps changing but my passion for dance remains undiminished.

From the time when I became the first South Asian Dance Animateur in Merseyside I have had the opportunity to take my dance across the cultural barrier to people of all ages and backgrounds. Lately my interest has shifted to working with and for the older members of the community.

It was another Churchill Fellow, Dr Richard Coaten, a well known dance movement therapist, who encouraged me to apply for this fellowship. His international network regularly reports fascinating information from Canada, about their work with the art and older people. This inspired me to go to Canada. I am taking this opportunity to thank everyone at Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

This is a collection of reflections and recollections from my amazing time in Canada where I made many personal and professional connections that rejuvenated and validated my own practice.

Over four weeks I travelled to Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. My journey took me to care homes, community centres, hospitals, dance studios, Art centres, museum and private houses. I learnt from their practice and shared my joy of dance. As the poet Roethke said

“I learn by going where I have to go.”

While steering through a busy schedule of meetings and workshops, I also enjoyed the awe inspiring natural beauty of the country and soaked myself in the excitement of busy urban life. As time went by my anxiety and apprehension dissolved into courage and confidence and strangers became friends.
Aims

I followed my dream to Canada with three aims.

1. Learning about current practice in the field of dance and older people
2. Exploring my own ‘late style’
3. Meeting mature South Asian dancers to understand views on aging and dance

1. Learning about current practice in the field of dance and older people

With the kind support from people I contacted before my journey and the new opportunities that opened door I could put together a very busy schedule in order to make the most of the trip and ensure I experienced and met as many people as I could.

It was very fortunate that within a limited period I managed to see so much. My time in Toronto coincided with the large annual Bengali Cultural convention NABC. I attended the weekend festival. Delegates travel from all over USA and Canada. Lead artists come from India. It is a place mainly of nostalgia and reminiscence but a wonderful example of an intergenerational event.

I visited large and small health settings, from modern care homes with two to three hundred residents to small basement rooms in community centres where art is being used to promote the health and wellbeing of the senior citizens of the country.

I was struck by the high standard of the residential centres I visited and noticed that alongside recreational activities the residents were actively encouraged to undertake tasks such as peeling potatoes or gardening, in the hope of maintaining a family atmosphere. Different neighbourhoods within the home often keep different pets. There are rooms where residents can have private meals with their families and boxes of toys in common social areas to encourage the family to bring children. All the care homes that I visited had well resourced art rooms and offered interesting arts projects. In one such place I joined in their regular music session. However I discovered that there was not much dance activity.

Every time I presented a dance workshop it was received with great interest. There was a clear appetite for more dance activities and what surprised residents most was the fact that I was using Indian dance techniques with them rather than dance forms they are more used to.

“What I learned and what I continue to reflect upon is that it is easy to create movements that fill one with joy. And from that joy comes a feeling of self satisfaction. In the workshop we were shown how to share our movements with others and weave these movements into a dance that both binds us and expresses our own individuality. Beautiful”

Louanna Cocchiarella, co editor, Journal of Alzheimer society, Canada
From my experience, it appeared that though Canada is a multi cultural country, culturally diverse dance and other arts are not being used in health settings. Often after our workshops there were discussions of new collaborations and exploring the possibility of using music and dance from other minority cultures.

My discussions with local Indian dance practitioners also supported this observation. I found that most dance artists are focussed on excellence and teaching dance for performance. They expressed interest in what I was doing and had many ideas of how they can deliver work but no one I met had any experience of doing work with the health and art sector or had any connections with any health settings. My respect for the richness of community dance practice in the UK increased. In England it is a reasonably common practice for South Asian dance artists to engage in different community dance initiatives. Comparing notes with other Churchill Fellows it seems that I was presenting more practical sessions than usual, even the round table discussions ended with everyone on their feet dancing. There was a genuine curiosity to know how a highly stylised form like Indian dance can be used in an informal way with their seniors. Sometimes, though I was prepared to give a verbal or power point presentation, it seemed more effective to take the people attending through a practical experience. It created an informal joyful atmosphere, as always it dissolves any professional hierarchy in the room and allowed a flow of conversation and openness.

“You began with a quote, “Dance gives me an enhanced sense of well being” and your work demonstrated how you bring that to life. As you said more than once, you cannot cure illness but you can use dance and the arts to draw people away from their suffering, give them a sense of connectedness rather than isolation and a feeling of mastery in situations where they are vulnerable and feel that they have lost control. You showed us how you raise awareness of dementia and make those with dementia participators in rather than observers of the arts. Particularly meaningful was your discussion of creating performances that are “dementia friendly” and welcome all who want to attend and take part.

“Equally enjoyable was the opportunity to become part of an in vivo demonstration of your work. It was wonderful to see our whole team up on their feet dancing around the room with so little inhibition”

Virginia Wesson, MD, MSc, FRCPC, Staff Psychiatrist, Mount Sinai Hospital

2. Exploring my own ‘late style’

After reading The Baring Foundations publication ‘Winter Fire’ by Francois Matarasso I was made aware of the fact that visual artists in particular can chart their careers in different periods as they acquire more skill, hone their style, become more or less risk taking and find their signature. This idea or appreciation of different stages and in particular a ‘late period’ is not translated to the performing arts in particular dance as it is such a physical form. However my one dream was to find new choreography for what can be called a 'late style' of dance for myself. I had a short yet enriching experience of working with a young choreographer Jacci Collin’s. We created a dance combining Jacci’s method of using the idea of landscapes of life and my interest in a poem by a Canadian poet Robert Bringhurst. I performed it for and with a group of senior dance students of Toronto’s Roundhouse community centre. It was interesting to see how Jacci found different incentives to inspire me to find movements and transitions from within myself. She then watched and arranged them to create a complete piece.
From this collaboration I have learnt a new tool of choreography and have successfully used this and sections of the dance in my recent workshops on my return from Canada.

3. Meeting with other mature South Asian dancers to understand views on ageing and dance

Finally I was curious to know how other mature South Asian dancer artists are adjusting to ageing. Due to some health concern and travelling schedules it was not possible to meet many of them face to face but I got an interesting picture of a variety of methods that other dancers are adopting.

The most common approach to aging for dancers was a move to teaching and producing. Another reasonably new development is to progress to dance movement therapy, particularly dance for people with Parkinson diseases. Since the Mark Morris dance group has developed high quality work and a syllabus in this field, dancers I met are going to the company to train to develop a different branch of employment beyond performing. There are other mature dance artists who are collectively creating new dances for performance or are inviting choreographers to specially create appropriate solos for themselves. One such artist that I met was Claudia Moore who discussed her own solo show and her hugely successful Old and Reckless series of festivals. Recently I have joined a group of mature dancers and some arts organisations with interest in dance and older people to discuss a national festival of older people and dance. It will be interesting to develop a festival like Old and Reckless in the UK and learn from Claudia’s model.

During my fellowship I came across two completely opposing viewpoints
"You must give up dance before it gives up you.” and "I will go on dancing till I am eighty and until the public hoots me off the stage" Both comments touched me deeply. Swaying between the two I continue my search for my "late style"
Outcomes

While I was in Canada the editor of Animated, the Foundation for Community Dance’s magazine requested I write about my experience. I have submitted the article "Yellow Butterfly" describing my many interesting encounters in Vancouver.

The current issue (Autumn 2013) of Pulse the magazine archiving Indian dance and music in the UK, has published an interview with me about my time in Canada travelling as a Churchill fellow (www.pulseconnects.com)

Soon after my return I was developing the second phase of our project "Fleeting Moment" a dementia friendly performance. My discussions with Jeanne Summerfield from The Society For The Arts In Dementia Care, Canada, proved invaluable.

Some of the sessions in Canada acted as a type of action research for the full production ‘Fleeting Moments’ – a dementia friendly piece performed a month after returning from the fellowship at Bluecoat Arts Centre, Liverpool

Louanna Cocchiarella the co editor of the Canadian Alzheimer society's publication has asked me to submit a brief article about the dementia friendly performance, for their ‘I can, I will’ section.

I found the dance piece I choreographed in Vancouver in collaboration with the dance artist Jacci Collins, very effective for "Fleeting Moment's outreach sessions in care homes. I used elements of that dance in my presentation for the Best Practice Seminar in Sadler's Wells, organised by Arts4Dementia.

We have a dedicated webpage about the fellowship within Chaturangan's website.

I am currently in discussion with Akademi, Indian dance UK, to provide training for their Baring Foundation funded initiatives for work with older people. This will be an excellent opportunity to share my learning with younger Indian dance artists. The formal and informal meetings and discussions have planted many seeds of new ideas.

I learnt that in some settings even young people with mental health issues are cared for along with people at early stages of Dementia and more advanced condition. In that situation they had to find activities that can be suitable for different levels of ability. How can we develop what Jeanne Sommerfield refers as ‘Open ended creative Incentives’? Something suitable for a group with mixed needs?, I remember Connie the social worker at the Wellness Centre who also works at the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care, which also supports the Chinese community, searching for activities for older people that can be undertaken in water. They have a pool in the centre. She feels that those coming with aches and pains may benefit from doing activities in the water. This is an interesting thought and one I would love to address if I were to get the opportunity. The points I have listed above are only the factual developments from the fellowship but what I have gained from being in Canada, meeting its kind and caring people, getting to know about the infrastructure of their care provision for seniors, the respectful attitude of their service industry, their openhearted welcome goes much deeper. It will sustain me for years to come.
Reflections on the journey

In my conversation with my grandson lies the essence of what I learnt from my visit to Canada as a Churchill fellow.

My exchange with colleagues working with senior citizens and contact with older people who attended my practical sessions highlighted the value of cross cultural communication. I have always been interested in searching for connections between apparently disconnected subjects. Cross cultural artistic initiatives excite me.

I believe that whenever a person connects with another, whether as an individual or a member of a group it uplifts the collective spirit and promotes a general feeling of Wellbeing, rendering cultural differences redundant.

Most of the establishments that I visited in Canada invited me to give workshops, even the round table meetings arranged for discussion and exchanges of information turned into joyful practical sessions.

What surprised care staff and my peers in Canada most was the animated response of the participants to the activities created drawing from Indian dance practices.

All the professionals, therapists, social workers, medical practitioners, researchers and older people at hospitals, care homes and drop in community centres that I worked with were familiar mainly with western theories and arts therapy. I was not sure if we can find a common point of reference. At first I was apprehensive about how older people in Canada would react to my appearance, accent and dance techniques. To my great relief I found that every time we could reach out and discover common grounds and shared moments of enjoyment.

The appreciative response from those I met at workshops gave me more confidence in my practice, at what can be a self doubting period of life for a dancer.

“Bisakha danced amongst them, taking hands, making eye contact, encouraging them to make the dance their own. That is when the magic really happened...strangers dancing together, making eye contact, smiling at each other...expressing their joy. I was surprised and delighted to see that most of the men were dancing and enjoying themselves...During the workshop she shared her love of dance, her culture and, how she came to be here on the Winston Churchill fellowship to follow her dream to come to Canada to inspire us with her love of dance. And she did.”

Barbara Karmazyn, independent arts provider for the seniors."

In the Confederation Centre, Vancouver, I walked into a hall where over 50 people of mixed ability and different cultural backgrounds, were sitting around the room. The workshop was arranged specially on a day when the Asian Elders group meet at the centre; so that they can join in. I had to find a way to make all of them welcome and engaged, even if it is to be at different levels. The session was enjoyed by all and I received a range of different compliments, for example, “you reminded me of my childhoods in India”, “I can do this new way of exercising at night in front of my TV.” and “this is helping cross-cultural communication “. The comments came from both Asian and First Nation Canadian participants.
We can clearly see that the workshop materials had a connection with a past in India as well as in the common activities of present day Canada.

Upon reflection I realised that there is a difference between the dance technique and the methods of its application. Because of the paucity of collaboration between Indian dancers and the those responsible for providing arts activities for older people, often no distinction is made between the two. My technique is culture specific but my practice is inclusive. When I deliver a session on dance for older people I use my Indian dance training to find appropriate movements but I aim to link them to the five ways of wellbeing and use them within the scope of the relevant duty of care constrains. Indian dance is regarded as an exotic and highly stylised form of dance. This overshadows the fact that it can be very successfully used as a tool for community dance initiatives. As an independent artist I intend to work with other organisations and through lectures, CPD training opportunities and my own practice draw attention to the importance of developing high quality Indian dance based work for the older people in the community, irrespective of cultural background. I wish to take this idea of communication and exchange a stage further and explore ways of communicating with another marginalised group, the people with early stages of dementia and their care givers.

In my role as the Artistic Director of Chaturangan, I have established partnership with venues, funders and other arts organisations to produce Fleeting Moment - the first dementia inclusive culturally diverse performance in a mainstream theatre venue in Liverpool. In Canada whenever I discussed this initiative I received a wonderful response. "As you said more than once, you cannot cure illness but you can use dance and the arts to draw people away from their suffering, give them a sense of connectedness rather than isolation and a feeling of mastery in situations where they are vulnerable and feel that they have lost control. You showed us how you raise awareness of dementia and make those with dementia participators in rather than observers of the arts. Particularly meaningful was your discussion of creating performances that are “dementia friendly” and welcome all who want to attend and take part."

Virginia Wesson, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto

Most Dementia related productions are issue based work, raising awareness or participatory work by the people with dementia. Fleeting moment is a performance in a mainstream theatre by professional artists from different cultural backgrounds to uplift the collective spirit. This inclusive performance offer people living with dementia and their families an opportunity to continue to take part in usual social activities. The first performance was covered by the UK based Indian dance magazine Pulse (www.pulseconnects.com http://issuu.com/sanjeevinidutta/docs/130902_pulse_122_web)

The Alzheimer society Canada has invited me to write about this new work for the ‘I can, I will’ section of their magazine. The inspiration of the new found friends and colleagues I met through my fellowship has reenergised me to continue this work of communicating through dance to take away the sadness of isolation and loneliness.
Recollections

The Yellow Butterfly
The news of receiving The Travel Fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust was not just exciting but much more. It was reassuring to know that life as a dance artist does not stop with serious ageing but at the same time it was frightening. Inevitably, the process of maturing has taken its toll and left its mark in the aching joints, reduced mobility and a lack of confidence - no more a spring chicken. Closer to 70 than 60, how would I cope with travelling to unknown cities and that too just by myself?

My dream was to go to Canada to see what is happening in the field of dance and ageing - How are they using art for the wellbeing of the older people in the community, what are the thoughts of the mature dance artists on ageing and how can my Canadian encounters influence my search for a 'Late' style of dancing for myself?

Two chance meetings introduced me to two practitioners from Vancouver, Jacci Collins and Barbara Karmazyn.

Jacci is a professionally trained dancer, currently teaching dance to older people. She had travelled to the UK to shadow Dr Richard Coaten (having originally met him at the round table he held in Canada during his 2010 fellowship) and to learn about the work taking place here with dance and older people.

Barbara works at residential care homes and at other centres for young people with disability. She uses a technique called Brain Dance. She is also known for her lively drumming sessions. I met her at a conference at Worcester University. Interestingly Barbara also met Dr Richard Coaten in Canada at the 2010 Pentiction Arts and Dementia Conference.

One other person, whose generosity made a huge difference to my visit to Vancouver, was Jeanne Summerfield, the secretary of The Society for the Arts in Dementia Care. I met her for the first time at Vancouver Airport on the 26th of July 2013. In no time we realised that we would be friends for a lifetime.

I had a full programme of activities including visits to care homes, observations, lectures, workshops, attending performances, working in the studio with a choreographer, meeting academics, working on ancient texts of Indian dance sightseeing and a chance meeting with a fellow student from the University, after nearly forty years.

My first appointment was at Kinsman Place Lodge in Surrey, BC to observe some of their programs. As my host introduced me to the group as the Churchill Fellow visiting from Liverpool, one gentleman from the group gave me a warm smile and started to talk fondly about his childhood in Liverpool. From this moment the whole group accepted me without any prejudice. The lecture demonstration in the afternoon, was organized by The Society for the Arts in Dementia care. The audience was keen and ready to join me in dance. It generated lively discussion. They talked about starting a group to develop dance based programs integrating multicultural dance input.

Two other care facilities, George Derby and the Drop in centre at The Confederation Community Centre for
the Retired, invited me to give a performance, workshops and a lecture for their staff. At the confederation
centre over fifty of seniors of mixed ability joined me in a practical session. The fun of care free dancing
brought people together. At George Derby, the care home for ex Army families, Albert, the representative of
the residents gave a heart warming speech and ended with the comment “I give you my heart”.

Apart from learning about the practice of art for older people I also wanted to try to work on a new dance
for me in my late style. Jacci Collins liked the idea. She organised studio time in Round House community
centre for us to explore some choreographic ideas. I came across a poem ‘Lanix Layalli’ by my favourite
Canadian poet, Robert Bringhurst. It stirred me deeply. I decided to take this poem as an inspiration.

Jacci engaged me in a relaxed conversation that allowed me time to move from one mind set to another. The
shift from being a facilitator to becoming a performer needs big change in concentration and attitude. Jacci
was calm and clear about her expectations. She kept an open mind and said “Let’s get to the studio and see
what happens”. We were interested in the process, product, if any, was to be a bonus. Jacci explained
how sometimes she uses the imagery of landscapes for making dance. She asked me about the landscapes
of my childhood. My immediate response was to say ”landscape? what landscape? I lived in Kolkata, a busy
city with built up areas”.

As I let my mind relax I recalled beautiful moments connected to specific areas and features of the city. I
started to dance. My movements were evolving from an imaginary journey through those landscapes.
While I was dancing, for the first time I realised that one of the images of Shiva that we use in the dance,
actually matches the landscape of India. My journey, through the memory lane, went from urban India to
the rural Cheshire in UK and gradually landed me to Vancouver. I remembered the landscape we saw
earlier, the mountains, the two peaks of Lion’s gate and the stretch known as sleeping princess. This
imaginary journey through different times of my life turned out to be an organic unfolding of a
choreography with Jacci watching carefully and making suggestions and giving choreographic instructions.
A dance started to emerge. My mind was floating from the past to the present, going backwards and
forwards, touching the emotional landscapes evoked by the natural landscapes that had been a part of my
life at one time or another.

Years of dancing has embedded different techniques in my body, in my bones, muscles and joints. Over the
years the body has processed them and have found its own way of responding to the signals from my
mind. Instead of trying to search for movements as building blocks for constructing the dance, I
concentrated on sharpening my awareness of the emotional landscapes and allowed my body to follow. In
fact, I was giving Jacci the materials that she can to set within a structure to make a dance. Our
collaboration ensured that what was felt and expressed could be communicated to an audience. Later in
the week I performed the piece for a group of seniors from the centre.

Heartfelt thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the Fellowship. It has enriched my life beyond
my expectation. Again and again I was touched by what Diane Amans, calls ’the brightness of being”.

This Fellowship gives one opportunity to rediscover one's own self, in the words of Ken Robinson a time to
be in one's own 'elements'.
Dear reader if you are still with me and wondering, so where is the butterfly?

Well the title came to me naturally. I accepted it without any question and then pondered on its significance.

On the first day of my arrival, we were sitting in the front porch, surrounded by tall trees, bushes, pot plants and hanging baskets full of brightly coloured flowers. Bees were humming, Hummingbirds singing and butterflies fluttering. Jeanne, my host, drew my attention to a yellow butterfly, happy, carefree and busy searching for who knows what... The evening sun’s light caught its wings and give it a golden glow. The dance of this yellow butterfly seems to reflect the essence my journey with the Churchill Fellowship. The evening light, the carefree rhythm, the insatiable curiosity, the joy of living in the moment in the knowledge that each moment could turn into a song celebrating life and I remember that “… there are songs still to be sung.”

The Wheelchair Experience

On reaching Toronto I took the Wheelchair assistance. Within seconds I clearly experienced that some power was taken away from me. I rushed to get out of the plane quickly to catch the connection. Had to look out for the assistance and walked outside to find a few wheelchairs and two people to manage six chairs. One gets talked to with an attitude verging on being invisible (insignificant).

I had to shift my attitude and learn to think of the wheelchair as something that is helping me to achieve more not as a symbol of loss and inability.

Access services are quite different in USA and Canada. On the whole they are good and caring and I was surprised to see how many people use the service these days. It seems that people undaunted and are keen to travel therefore have less inhibition about travelling in wheelchairs. The stigma about the wheelchair being a symbol of inability seems to be fading.

Because I can still make it to the gate or to the plane it feels frustrating to sit and wait when I see everyone walking passed me. Being at the mercy of someone else’s convenience challenges my independence. I had an ardent reluctance to give in, to give up the ability to move freely. However, the fact is that even if I am the first to come out of the plane, I will not be able to reach the next point of the journey before the last person who leaves the plane.

I cannot deny that using the wheelchair felt somewhat like a closure. I pondered the real purpose for the invention of the wheelchair was to increase mobility not to steal it away.

If I can not walk to a friend’s house or to the next city and I decide to drive it does not necessarily affect my self esteem. When I buy or change my car I actually feel good. We talk about make and model and colour and design of the car. That intervention is power.

I thought to myself, can I then reprogram my attitude about wheelchairs?

Mamata, a fellow dance artist from Montreal advised me to take a wheelchair, saying that many do not use this facility due to vanity but without that how can we travel through these large North American airports with long walks from one part to another?

The stewardess in the plane ignored me when I said that I can walk if the gates are not too far. She firmly said "Save your energy for those you know, don’t waste it for those you don’t. Stay at your seat till I come for you".

I agreed. I remembered a very good reason for me to use this facility. Given the choice, I would rather save my knees for dancing.
Redefining Heritage

Little did I know that my visit to the dance library of a Ballet school in Montreal would move me so much. It stirred some very deep emotions and led me to take a fresh look at my dance heritage.

I did not know Vincent Warren till I met him, a kind looking man with grey hair and a friendly smile. His eyes light up when he talks about dance. When I read about him in the encyclopaedia I saw that my impression of him from our very short meeting was right. It said:

‘Vincent de Paul Warren became one of the most accomplished and versatile dancers in the company’s history and a star in his own right. His noble looks and refined dancing made him an ideal interpreter of classical roles from the traditional story-ballet repertoire, yet he equally excelled in contemporary works ... After retiring from the stage (in 1979) Warren. ... concentrated his attention on the development and maintenance of its now large library and archive of dance books, documents, videos and related materials.... In 2010, the library was renamed Bibliothèque de la Danse Vincent-Warren in honour of his years of dedication to both the library and the school.”

His library left a deep impression on me. It was a place where I felt at ease, where my dance past and present could comfortably sit together. My inherited heritage of dance and the evolving legacy of my lived experiences of dancing in the West came together in this dance library, in Montreal.

It had a box full of archived program notes and articles on my teacher Uday Shankar from 1930 onwards, large framed photograph of Ruth St Denis on the wall and an image of a UK based kathak dancer Sonia Sabri by my friend and colleague, renowned photographer Simon Richardson. It humbled me to see that the library had a copy of Fergus Early and Jackey Lansley’s book "Wise Body " which has a chapter on my dance training and views on dancing as a mature artist.

This visit was not in my original itinerary, but I am so happy that Dr Mamata Niogy Nakra introduced me to Vincent Warren and his library.

As soon as I entered the library my eyes fell upon a large framed photograph of Ruth St Denis which took my breath away. This was not like any other prints I have seen in dance books. It made her spirit come alive. I was transported to a different reality, the one in which she was alive and dancing. I remembered a comment by a dance scholar that had left a lasting impression in my mind. Talking about photography Nigel said "shutters come down to sever the past from the present". It seemed as though I could peer through the present image to that very moment when the shutter came down and captured this image. This is the woman whose love and passion for Indian dance has paved the path for me to reach where I have got today. Seeing my reaction to the photograph Vincent asked the librarian to bring three large cardboard boxes full of invaluable collection of programme notes, newspaper cuttings and articles on Ruth St Denis, Pavlova and Uday Shankar from the 1930 onward. I was amazed. A history of my own dancing heritages?

I was trained in Uday Shankar style of creative dance from his life and dancing partner Amala Shanker, I was fortunate to hear stories of Pavlova from Uday Shankar himself,

I feel inspired by Ruth St Denis’s devotion and pursuit of spirituality in dance and it makes me immensely happy to see Simon’s picture of Sonia's in this collection. These varied fragments of dance histories are part of my dance persona. Together they make me who I am. The reality was that there I was, an Indian dance artist from 21st century Britain, visiting Canada on a fellowship from WCMT.
My dance aesthetics are informed by a plethora of influences from both the east and the west. It has been shaped by ancient Indian wisdom and the integrity of the current dance practice in the West. A place like this library validates my position as an Indian dance artist from outside of India. It was an honour to meet Vincent Warren. It seemed to me that he has found a sense of fulfilment in developing this library a kind of extension of his dancing life. In the library there was a large picture of him as a young dancer in a striking pose. I took a picture of him standing next to the framed image. When I showed him the photograph he said I can't dance like him. I said "the one in the picture does not have the lovely smile like yours" He laughed and agreed "No. He had no time". More than any words, the picture of him next to his old photograph, revealed to me "where does beauty lie, if not in youth."
Appendix

Appendix 1
Dance artists, therapists and scholars I met during the Fellowship

Jeanne Summerfield
Jeanne Summerfield, the secretary of The Society for the Arts in Dementia Care (Canada) was the first person in Canada, to welcome me as a Churchill Fellow. She set me off to a good start. She is a Therapeutic Recreational Practitioner. The day I arrived her senior’s writing group wrote about their favourite dancers. During the day she took me to the visits and lectures that she had organised for me. In the evening we exchanged notes. She is at the same time curious, knowledgeable and compassionate. My thanks to Dr Dawn Brooker and Dr Dalia Gottlieb-Tanaka to get me in touch with Jeanne.

Jacci Collins
Jacci Collins is an independent dance artist, choreographer, yoga instructor and dance educator based in Vancouver. Jacci’s current practice brings dance to all ages and abilities. For several years she has been running a dance class for seniors. Her classes emphasise a strong awareness of physicality along with self-acceptance and trust in the innate intelligence of the body. This is what touched me when I worked with her to create a new choreography for myself. A new collection for my "late style" After our choreographic collaboration she felt that it was easier to work with a mature artist.

Jai Govinda
"You must give up dance before it gives up you." said Jai Govinda, a well known French -Canadian bharatanatyam dance artist from Vancouver during a casual conversation. Before meeting him in person I had seen a photograph of him in the cover of a dance book written by dr Mandakranta Basu a beautiful image of an young dancer that told me what a wonderful dancer he must be. He believes that there is time for everything. He made the observation that bharatanatyam is primarily a solo dance form so there are no obvious roles for mature dancers to move to. He then went on to say that in Ballet there are character roles so after the days of being the principal dancer one can move to the character roles. (Although I have heard many heart wrenching stories of that transition)
I attended a student showcase of his dance school. His excellence as a dance artist, teacher and choreographer was evident in the performance. He has channelled his energy in teaching and gets great satisfaction from training his students. Though he did say that one can dance in advanced ages if one can be in the present, I think he meant that if one can find the right context and content that reflects the present time.

Barbara Karmazyn
Barbara offers lively drumming sessions and is trained in running workshops with Brain Dance. With programs that are designed for all populations, Barbara offers workshops, play shops, events and courses to suit a wide variety of groups, with varied needs and goals. She also designs an innovative programme that is based on creative expression using Visual Art, Dance, Storytelling and Rhythm. She set up a number of workshops for me at different community and residential centres in Vancouver.
We shared a session for Jacci’s seniors group where she delivered her Brain dance workshop. It was very good. I learnt about the importance of certain movements that can contribute to our general Wellbeing. Barbara accompanied me and introduced me to the centres where she works. It was very useful to observe each other’s practice and learn from that. On few occasions we danced together and through that came closer.

**Andreah Barker**
Andreah Barker completed her Master’s degree in dance at York University. After turning 30 she did a soul searching and wanted to do something different. She took an interest in dance/movement therapy where she feels that she can dance and stay connected. At present she is working at Toronto’s Baycrest Centre. When she first started she had a supervisor who helped her to gain confidence. She is writing a thesis on dance movement therapy in Canada. She explained why she thinks Dance movement therapy is important. She said
"In dance movement therapy work you can find a way to be you, move as you are, find where you are and move to a better place."
She strongly believes that there is a need to come together and see each others work, knowledge and share.
She has taken the route of dance therapy and community dance to continue with her dancing.

**Sarah Robichaud**
Sarah Robichaud was a professional dancer as well as a personal trainer, researcher, writer and presenter. She found out about Mark Morris group’s dance for PD program in USA and went to train with the company. Initially she was mentored by a doctor in the hospital. She has started with 15 participants and now in its 5th year she has 7 teachers and runs one main and several smaller regular dance classes for the patients with PD. She expressed a need to recruit and train more dance artists to open other classes across Toronto.
From her presentation I learnt that PD affects the part of the brain that controls movement. In layman's term rhythm, music and movement come from the same place.
Mark Morris Dance Company has pioneered the dance for PD program. They have developed a real syllabus and making a real impact in the dance world. It is becoming a popular choice to go to the company to train in this program. Dance for PD is fast becoming a career option beyond the performing career. In UK English national ballet is taking a lead to offer classes in London and rolling out this program in the regions. Currently they are working in Oxford and Liverpool to develop ongoing programs run by local artists and offering CPD for dance artists I the region.
I was fortunate to attend one of Sarah's satellite classes in the basement of a small community centre. It was reassuring to see how similar their routines were to the program I have developed for Namaskar the "Indian dance for limited mobility ’ pack. I have witnessed first hand how the participants enjoyed and valued the class.
**Claudia Moore**

Claudia Moore is a Performer, curator and artistic director

Claudia Moore, performer, curator and artistic director of MOonhORsE dance theatre, has been a force on the Canadian dance scene since the late 70's.

Claudia founded MOonhORsE in 1996 and continues to perform her own works with her company. Claudia’s acclaimed series for senior dance artists, Older & Reckless, is now celebrating its 14th season.

From a modest start it has grown into a regular festival.

When I met her she was preparing for her solo show Escape artist. Initially she joined other friend and colleagues to make dance as nature artists. From that she decided to move to getting three dances made for her by different choreographers.

It was immediately inspiring to meet her. She is finitely a dancer who is addressing her ageing in a positive and truly artistic way.

"ESCAPE ARTIST has been a glorious adventure, surpassing my hopes, with a wonderful team of artists. I knew this solo project would give me the challenge I craved, but didn't realize the personal leaps I needed to take to deliver these potent solos"

**Mandakranta Bose**

Dr. Mandakranta Bose is Professor Emerita at the Institute of Asian Research at UBC and Director of the Institute's Centre for India and South Asia Research.

She is a dance Scholar and has written an impressive collection of books on classical India dance. She has also performed with Tagore songs. We had a discussion on current practice of Tagore dance

**Lata Pada**

Lata Pada is an Indian-born Canadian choreographer and Bharatanatyam dancer. Pada is the founder and artistic director of Sampradaya Dance Creations, a dance company that performs South Asian dance.

Lata Pada’s choreography reflects the range of her creativity within traditional and non-traditional spheres of artistic expression, including inter-cultural dance collaborations with artists of diverse dance genres. I visited her school and dance studio in Mississauga. It is a beautifully set up establishment. There was something like a wall of fame with framed photographs of senior students who had done their arrengatram (a performance to mark the students entry into the world of formal dancing ). the school is a centre for excellence for Bharatanatyam but they also offer intensive summer school to widen the horizon of the students by introducing them to other styles of dancing. The institution was very focused on performance.

From the little I have observed Indian dance community in Canada have not made an inroad into the world of community dance. I have not come across any example of Dancing within the health setting or for the Wellbeing of the growing older population within the Indian dance community. She was interested in the work that I have been doing with and for older people.

We had a brief discussion of dancing and ageing. She said that at a young one wants to be like other people one admires. The body does not lie when one is old. That is when one can have courage to be who one is. She could think of creating dances for herself in narrative style, abhinaya, with movements coming from within herself. As such with does not mind not dancing. She feels that her body moves when it hears music. She expressed passing interest in developing work for the care of older people.

I passed her the contact of Joseph DeSouza, assistant professor of Psychology, York University. Who was a
collaborator of CRETE programme on Computational Approaches in Neuroscience Action Control & Transformation. I met him at a session of dance for PD. He expressed interest to find someone with Indian dance background to assist him in his research work.

**Dr Virginia Wesson** MD, MSc, FRCPC
Staff Psychiatrist, Mount Sinai Hospital Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Health Complex and Assistant Professor, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.
She arranged a roundtable presentation of my work for Reitman Centre staff as well as and invited individuals in the hospital or community working with people with dementia and their caregivers. Social workers, occupational therapists, social workers, physicians and artists. It turned out to be a true platform for exchange. I was invited by one of the staff to go back next day to further discuss some creative ideas for their programs.

**Hari Krishnan**
Professor of Dance at Wesleyan University, Artistic Director at inDANCE
Hari Krishnan’s company inDANCE (www.indance.ca) is one of Canada’s most progressive dance companies. It presents works that are an original synthesis of artistic director Hari Krishnan’s South Asian and Western aesthetic sensibilities. While respecting the legacy of tradition, inDANCE boldly investigates post-modern evolutions that place the company on a trajectory of imbibing influences from the West into its strong and confident idiom of contemporary Asian cultures. The company aims to create work that is daring and radical—dancing outside the box. It produces eclectic, sensual, virtuosic and evocative dance creations that challenge dominant discourses on global culture.
I reached Toronto the day before he left for a tour abroad. Still he came to see me. He appreciated the way UK based Indian dancers are engaging with different meaningful community dance practices. I was impressed with the clarity of his thinking. He raised the question "How can we make kinder dancers"? From our discussion it seemed that Indian dance artists in Canada are not so involved in community dance with wider communities. Their work is mainly performance and excellence focused.

**Mamata Niogy Nakra**
Mamata Niogy Nakra is a choreographer, Teacher, Scholar – Bharata Natya, Indian classical dance. She is the director of Kala bharati, an institute dedicated to the promotion of Indian dance and culture in Montreal. At present the organisation is engaged in organising different cultural exchange and developing educational resources and teaching aids to make the learning of Bharatanatyam fun.

**Vincent Warren**
Vincent de Paul Warren, the dancer, teacher, historian, lecturer, archivist. He is renowned for his encyclopaedic knowledge and understanding of dance and its history. He has collaborated with Mamata for a publication on Indian Dance. He still maintains a mesmerising presence and has remained totally devoted to Dance.

**Dr Abhijit Sen & Nandini Sen**
It was through their generosity that I could meet Dr Mandakranta Bose. They also gave me a tour of The UBC campus and Vancouver including a drive through the famous Stanley Park. I met Abhijit, a classmate from Presidency College Calcutta, after only 42 years.
Appendix

Appendix 2  **Places visited during the Fellowship**

**Vancouver**
1. Kinsman Place Lodge in Surrey, BC
   1. Round House Community centre
   2. Surrey Art Centre
   3. The Confederation Centre
   4. George Derby Residential Care Home.
   5. The University of BC
   6. Stanley park
   7. Victoria, the capital of BC

**Toronto**
1. The 33rd North American Bengali Conference
2. Reitman Centre, Mount Sinai Hospital
3. Beycrest hospital
4. Sarah Robichaud's Dance for PD class
5. Sampradaya Indian dance centre
6. Bata Shoe Museum

**Montreal**
1. Kala Bharati Dance Centre
2. Hindu Temple
3. Vincent Warren’s Dance Library

and Niagara Falls!
Appendix 3

Comments from the host organisations


Watching Bisakha engage with the Elders living at Kinsman Place Lodge in Surrey, BC was a joy! The Elders she conversed with were open and welcoming, not showing any reluctance as they might when meeting a stranger who is from a different culture from theirs, and speaks with a different accent. As she introduced herself to the participants in the Java Music Club lead by the staff Music Therapist, Bisakha met a man who was from Liverpool, close to her neighbourhood! The gentleman spoke of where he had lived, where his father had worked, and how his family had decided to emigrate to Canada. Bisakha was familiar with the places he named, and the conversation carried on for several minutes. As some of the other members of the group observed this exchange, I could see that this man felt special, that he was able to stand out from the group, having this conversation with Bisakha. As the group continued, Bisakha was included in the dialogue, and shared a summer song, singing in Bengali, giving us all a chance to hear something unusual, and beautiful. The group members listened attentively, nodding and smiling as she explained the meaning.

As the group broke up at the end of the session, laughter, handshakes, and good wishes echoed down the hall.

When we visited the space that serves as art room/multipurpose space, there was a woman painting a miniature birdhouse. Bisakha admired her work, and the woman started speaking with Bisakha. It turned out that they could understand each other, though their languages were not exactly the same. Again, I could see that this woman was enjoying the conversation, and she had so much to say. Where she is living, there are few people who speak her language, and she does not speak English very well. Once again, Bisakha was able to provide an opportunity for the this elder artist to be heard, to feel special.

2. Barbara Karmazyn  Awaken Your Creativity

Over a 24 hour period it was my privilege to join Bishakha in three sessions during her stay in Vancouver. The following is what I observed

Confederation community centre for the retired

This was a one hour workshop with over fifty people. There were women and from many different cultures with mixed abilities: some in wheelchairs, some with walkers and one woman on crutches. Given the fact that we were in a very large circle, it was difficult for everyone to hear her introduction, especially those with hearing challenges. However as soon as Bisakha began to move, people began to move as well…the connection was made in a very powerful way.

Bisakha brings a spiritual component to both her dance and her workshop, beginning with a prayer to welcome dance and music to enter our bodies, and inviting us, the participants to join her in that prayer. It is the first thing that she does. With this, we were all together, no distinction between her the “workshop leader/performer/dance artist” and us, the participants. We were all sharing an experience together, with Bisakha gently guiding us. At one point a Punjabi woman asked “are you going to perform classical dance?” and she said “no I will not do a classical dance... that is not what I do” Bisakha does so much more. During the workshop she shared her love of dance, her culture and, how she came to be here on the Winston
Churchil fellowship to follow her dream to come to Canada to inspire us with her love of dance. And she did. During her stories, those who could hear listened intently to what she had to say. No one fidgeted. One woman, was nodding her head up and down, saying yes over and over with excitement as if Bisakha was affirming her own beliefs. Bishakha reached this woman’s spirit.

Bisakha ... invited the group to dance. Some stood right away and moved forward into the space, others were more hesitant. However within minutes all of those people moved their bodies around the space. Bisakha danced amongst them, taking hands, making eye contact, encouraging them to make the dance their own. That is when the magic really happened...strangers dancing together, making eye contact, smiling at each other...expressing their joy. I was surprised and delighted to see that most of the men were dancing and enjoying themselves.

**Presentation and workshop at George Derby**

In the afternoon of the same day, I took Bishakha to a care facility to do give a presentation to a group of recreational practitioners and art therapists followed by a session with some of the residents...many who have dementia.

**Presentation with staff**

Before her talk she did a movement activity so that we could learn her name. Within minutes she had captured their attention through the dance. The main thing that stood out for me was how a non dance community of practitioners fell under her magic spell and danced with her. I heard a few people say that they should dance more...take a class...etc.

Within the group was one resident, a spry gentleman, much beloved by all the staff who attends everything. During a rhythmic activity where Bisakha was using the words Ta Key Ta, he cheekily said Ca Ca (clearly meaning the bodily function). When Bishakha and the rest of us laughed and repeated what he said, instead of reacting, he literally transformed...even getting up and dancing with us a few minutes later. At the end of the session, he put his hands to his heart and said some beautiful words of gratitude to Bisakha. He was reflecting back to her the “heart language” that she had used. Later, during the workshop with the residents, this gentleman was fully engaged, watching her intently and dancing. Once again he thanked her from his heart for what she had given them all that day.

**Workshop with Residents**

Many of the elders in that group had hearing problems, so in the beginning, during her introduction, they looked confused or disinterested. However once she began to move they followed her. then as often happens with people with dementia they stopped. Bisakha went around the circle making a connections with each person, making eye contact, putting her hands in their hands or wrapping her hands around their hands. There was an especially magical moment with one woman who is deaf, and who often sits with a dour expression on her face. When Bisakha approached her and took her hands, this womans face brightened...eyes opening wider, and a smile began to form. When Bisakha took the risk to bring her to her feet, her smile widened. They held hands, gently swaying from side to side together...dancing a slow dance.

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3. **Dr Virginia Wesson MD, MSc, FRCPC Staff Psychiatrist, Mount Sinai Hospital**

It was an honour to have such a distinguished visitor and we all appreciated the time you devoted to us and your willingness to share your wonderful work. You asked for a summary of the visit so I will start with a list of those who attended:

You very much enjoyed learning about your work that uses dance in the care of individuals with dementia and their family and professional caregivers both in the community and in care homes. You began with a quote, “Dance gives me an enhanced sense of well being” and your work demonstrated how you bring that to life. As you said more than once, you cannot cure illness but you can use dance and the arts to draw
people away from their suffering, give them a sense of connectedness rather than isolation and a feeling of mastery in situations where they are vulnerable and feel that they have lost control. You showed us how you raise awareness of dementia and make those with dementia participators in rather than observers of the arts. Particularly meaningful was your discussion of creating performances that are “dementia friendly” and welcome all who want to attend and take part.

Equally enjoyable was the opportunity to become part of an in vivo demonstration of your work. It was wonderful to see our whole team up on their feet dancing around the room with so little inhibition. Again, thank you so very much for coming. I hope you enjoy the remainder of your time in Canada.

- Jenny – occupational therapist and mental health clinician who leads the group for the individuals with dementia
- Gita – occupational therapist and mental health clinician who facilitates carers’ groups and has an interest in mindfulness
- Rhonda – clinical psychologist and mental health clinician with extensive knowledge of neuropsychiatry
- Jenny – program assistant who helps in the coordination of our group program
- Dunstan – research assistant who is involved in the evaluation of our program
- Sarah – social worker and mental health clinician who facilitates groups and sees individual carers
- LJ – educator, experienced simulated patient with extensive knowledge of experiential learning and who is also an actor
- Helene – program manager with a diverse background which includes working in the non profit sector in Africa
- Einat – occupational therapist and mental health clinician who works closely with family physicians and their teams providing support to them as they care for patients with dementia and their families
- Kelvin – social work student visiting from Hong Kong and working at the Wellness Centre, a satellite clinic providing services to the Chinese community
- Connie – social worker at the Wellness Centre who also works at the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care which also supports the Chinese community

4. Andreah Barker. Baycrest Hospital

On July 10th 2013, Bisakha Sarker joined the Baycrest community to provide two workshops and participate in a panel discussion on dance and the older adult. Her first workshop was held in the Psychiatric Day Hospital for Depression. There were eleven clients and three staff members, including two nurses, in attendance. As the session progressed, I witnessed clients becoming more fully engaged in the moment. Later they reported that they had enjoyed experiencing something new.

Our afternoon group was attended by Bianca Stern, director of Culture, Arts & Innovation at Baycrest as well as a dance researcher, social worker, Baycrest volunteer, and a summer student. The session proved to be a wonderful experience for all who attended. I can personally report that I felt far more relaxed and grateful for having had the opportunity to participate.

The afternoon panel discussion was attended by approximately twenty members of the local dance as well as healthcare communities. Some of the participants included Claire Wooten, the chair of the dance program at York University and Sarah Robichaud, founder of Dancing with Parkinson’s. We spent an hour
sharing our work and discussing the importance of dance, in its many forms, with the older adult population.
I feel that many people were able to benefit from Bisakha’s visit. Her presence, knowledge, and experience made for a very inspiring day.

Appendix 4

The inspiration for the dance

Larix Lyallii
In the threadbare
air, through the tattered
weave of leaves,
the blue light cools
into ash-black shadows.

Tree: the high
thought roots itself
In the luminous clay
of the caught light’s closeness
to audibility.

So we know that again
today there are songs
still to be sung. They
exist. Just on the other
side of mankind.

Robert Bringhurst