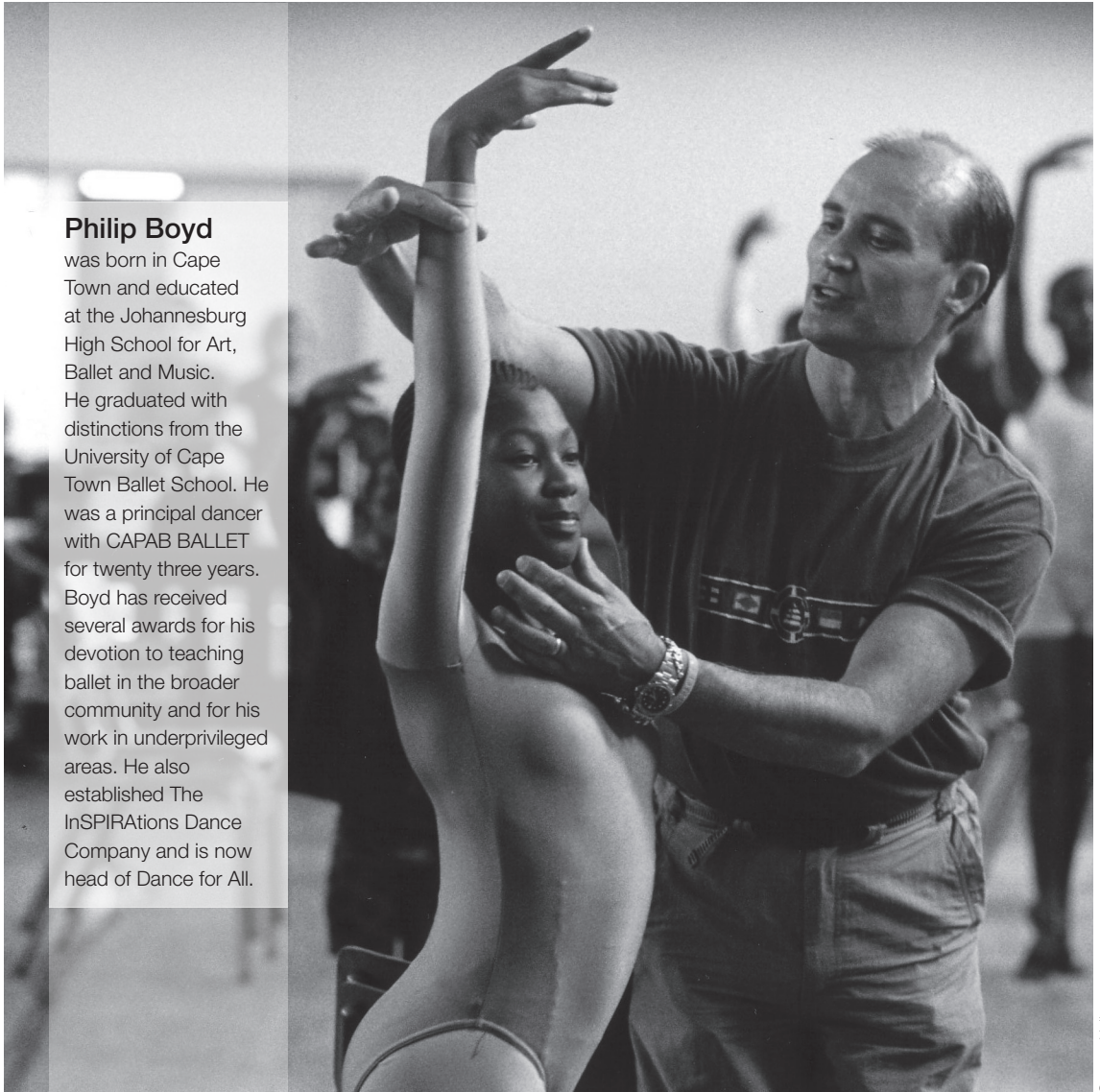


Sharing the Magic of Dance

Philip Boyd

was born in Cape Town and educated at the Johannesburg High School for Art, Ballet and Music. He graduated with distinctions from the University of Cape Town Ballet School. He was a principal dancer with CAPAB BALLET for twenty three years. Boyd has received several awards for his devotion to teaching ballet in the broader community and for his work in underprivileged areas. He also established The InSPIRations Dance Company and is now head of Dance for All.



George Hallett

I can hardly believe Dance for All (DFA) has already come of age. We have been through our childhood, coped with our adolescence and are now going into our maturity with more wisdom. I marvel at how quickly the past 21 years have gone. I also reflect back over the challenging, yet joyous and extraordinary journey this has been for us all.

My inspiration

Dance has been part of my life since childhood when my mother took me to performances at the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg on Saturday afternoons. The magic of the theatre; the orchestra warming up their instruments before the curtain rose, the music, then a world opening up before my eyes – scenery, costumes, special effects and the lovely movement of the dancers. This ignited a fire within me. I was lucky to have experienced this in childhood and it's something I've always wanted to share. It inspired me to create an organisation and structure for children to have the same opportunity I had during my formative years. I wanted to make sure other children could share in the magic. My initial vision was to enable children in underprivileged areas to have the opportunity of getting dance training – no matter what their circumstances.

When I reflect on the development, expansion and growth of DFA, it is incredibly rewarding – especially when I remember the many skeptics who did not support what I believed was vital to the development of a new generation of dancers in this country.

An evolving organisation

Having started off at Sivuyile College in Gugulethu in 1991 with a small group of 34 dance students, we have now reached the point where some of our senior students who showed leadership potential have emerged as very good teachers within DFA. Some of our founder senior assistant student teachers have moved on to other teaching opportunities, which is a credit to DFA and the training they had with us.

The move from Sivuyile College to Masikhanye Centre, also in Gugulethu, made it possible to increase the intake of students and created a performing venue for DFA. With sponsorship, we were able to expand the stage area, install a wooden floor, ballet barres and mirrors – giving our students the experience of having their own dance studio in the township. There have been many challenges at this centre, which we continue to struggle with. But this did not stop DFA from expanding its outreach work to the areas of Nyanga and Khayelitsha, which created the opportunity for more children to enjoy dance training.

As a dynamic organisation that is constantly evolving, DFA is aware of the importance of responding to changing needs and circumstances. As a result, our training programmes have remained fluid and

we continue to fine-tune them to meet the need for inclusive, broad-based dance classes, as well as specialist training for talented students emerging from the Cape Town Outreach Programme.

Nurturing talent

As part of our further development of talented students, DFA ran a Scholarship Programme for more than 10 years. Specially chosen students attended Alexander Sinton High School in Crawford and, with Prima Ballerina Assoluta (OMSG) Phyllis Spira as head of this programme, dancers of an excellent standard, with outstanding technique, were trained.

Seeing these talented students grow and develop artistically gave Phyllis and I the impetus to start a professional arm of DFA. The result was the DFA Youth Company, which created a showcase for their work and established role models for other young dancers.

Performances and the interesting repertoire they developed created artistic opportunities for the dancers and a number of choreographers and teachers wanted to work with them. One of these was Kristine Elliott, who heads the ballet department at Stanford University in San Francisco. Kristine arranged sponsorship for some of our dancers to attend a few summer ballet courses in San Francisco. She has continued to visit DFA every second or third year and has helped to forge partnerships for us to get international teachers and choreographers to work with DFA students.

Raising DFA's profile

The exciting collaboration and partnership we had with the musicians of The Buskaid String Ensemble in Diepkloof, Soweto, was a real highlight for some of our DFA Youth Company members. It created the opportunity for them to work with renowned conductor Sir John Elliott Gardner in performances in Paris and at a performance of the PROMS at London's Royal Albert Hall in 2007. The collaboration with The Buskaid String Ensemble also resulted in performances in Canada and New Zealand. This, in turn, generated a great deal of interest about DFA's work and gave us international exposure.

During the period of the DFA Youth Company's existence (2005 to 2008) a partnership was established with Cape Town City Ballet (CTCB) and some of our dancers participated in a number of ballet seasons

with CTCB at the Artscape Opera House. Again, this drew attention to DFA.

The many television and film documentaries on the work of DFA and our students, made by MNet's *Carte Blanche*, CNN, French TV, Dutch TV, Norwegian TV, the BBC, German TV and HBO over the past 21 years, has also raised awareness of our organisation internationally and brought us much-needed support. The TV exposure has also encouraged volunteers to come and work with us at regular intervals. This part of our work continues to expand, in partnership with other volunteer organisations locally and abroad.

Shining stars

Seeing the growth of talented dance students who have become leaders in their own communities and within our organisation has been such a joy. Hope Nongqongqo – who has been with DFA since its inception – is now an excellent African Dance teacher, having created her own style of African and Contemporary Dance. Hope is also doing a fine job of coordinating our Cape Town Outreach programme.

Then there are talented students who furthered their training in London and Switzerland and some of them are now working professionally here and abroad. Two students I'd like to mention are Mbulelo Ndabeni who is dancing with the Rambert Company in the UK and Xola Putye, now a Senior Soloist with CTCB. The success of these talented dancers is a great testament to the training they got during their formative years. What a privilege and joy it is to see these dancers having reached their potential in becoming professional dancers.

One of the most important aspects of our work – and ultimately what DFA is all about – is that some of our former students are now working back in the communities they came from, assisting in the empowerment of children. Creating opportunities for others and sharing and giving of our knowledge is so exciting and is as it should be.

Growth and expansion

Building up a good, solid staff has taken time – and this process continues each year as staff come and go. How lucky we are to have well-known ballet teachers Margie Sim and Ingrid Carlson in Cape Town, both of whom have set a standard of work that is exciting for the future of dance within DFA and for the future of dance generally.

This year, we have started an in-house teacher's training course for our assistant teachers, under the expert guidance of Gillian Joubert – to develop their skills and ensure that we maintain an excellent professional standard.

In addition to our teaching staff, DFA's administrative and operational staff members play an integral role in keeping the organisation running. They've been at the core of ensuring that, after 21 years, DFA is not only going strong, but is also growing and expanding. As most of our students do not pay for their dance training, we have to raise funds to continue our work. For example, our Annual Fund campaign, with the Friends of Dance for All, is a way for the public to support DFA.

The establishment of our Stepping Out tours, which have become an annual highlight, has created much excitement in the small towns we visit, inspiring many rural children to want dance training. We therefore decided to replicate DFA's recipe by developing Rural Outreach Programmes in McGregor, Zolani, Bonnievale, Montagu and Barrydale.

Ups and downs

Working in underprivileged areas is both rewarding and extremely challenging. We are not only dance teachers, but play the role of fathers and mothers, often providing a lifeline for many of our students. Before a child has even started a dance class with us, there are so many aspects of their development we have to assist with. This can take its toll on the teachers, who give an enormous amount emotionally.

The losses we have suffered have been very hard to come to terms with. I think of my wife and life partner Phyllis Spira who had such wisdom and insight. Phyllis's passing came far too soon for all of us, but we feel her presence with us and I know she's looking over us with her very special smile.

We also remember Thandumzi Moyakhe, who died in a car accident in December 2008. He joined DFA at the age of 11 and was on the initial Scholarship Programme. He later became a member of the DFA Youth Company and went on to dance professionally, also becoming a fine choreographer. One of his choreographic pieces, *The Dancing Violin*, is still performed regularly by DFA.

My extended vision and dream of creating a fully-fledged professional dance company was made possible in 2008 with funding from the National Arts Council. The InSPIRATIONS Dance Company, which was named in honour of Phyllis Spira, was a reflection of what she lived and worked for.

There was much excitement at DFA about establishing a company of nine highly talented professional dancers who had been auditioned nationally and came from diverse demographic and dance backgrounds.

Being part of the artistic partnership with renowned choreographer Adele Blank (InSPIRATIONS Artistic Adviser) was a highlight for the entire organisation. Adele brought to the InSPIRATIONS Dance Company a new and exciting repertoire that also raised the standards of professional dance in Cape Town.

InSPIRATIONS opened with the production, *Pieces of a Dream*, followed by a successful season of Cotton Club Moves. Sadly, InSPIRATIONS Dance Company had to disband at the end of September 2009 due to discontinued funding. Its closure was an extremely difficult time for DFA and for the dancers.

These are just some of the highs and lows we have had to deal with. However, I have always believed that when one door closes, another opens.

The future

As staff we know we've done our jobs well when our approximately 1500 students can go out into the world and cope on their own – drawing on the discipline they've learned and the high standard of professional training they've received.

We go ahead into the next 21 years with many new and exciting ideas and projects – such as the establishment of our Young InSPIRATIONS Performing Group, which will have the opportunity for many public performances and tours.

A carefully devised five-year plan for DFA is being put into place, as well as a succession plan that is vitally important for the future. I have always been a cultural activist and will continue to be one in guiding DFA into the next era with passion – and with the commitment to create and open up even more opportunities for our children.