

# The Beat of Jazz

**As BOP Jazz Theatre Company celebrates its 25th anniversary, Katie Willy talks to Co-Directors *Dollie Henry* and *Paul Jenkins* about the unique nature of jazz dance and music and highlights some of the company's key achievements.**



Dollie Henry and Paul Jenkins



Left to Right, Ida Kummervold, Elisha Chou Hsieh, Sheriya Clement-Pascall

Since its inception in 1996, Body of People Jazz Theatre Company (BOP) has been at the forefront of the UK's jazz dance scene. Founded by Artistic Director Dollie Henry, performer, choreographer, director and educator, and Co-Director Paul Jenkins, jazz trumpeter, composer and producer, the company has created a rich plethora of jazz dance and music theatre both nationally and internationally.

25 years of creation has produced an eclectic collection of works, notably *Touches of Miles* and *Duke's Place*, which pay homage to the great legends of jazz music. Original compositions of a more poignant and political nature, *Through the Eyes of a Woman* and *I.A.M.*, for example, call directly on the emotional, lived experiences of the company dancers.

In conversation with Dollie, it's clear that the collaboration between the music and dance is fundamental to the artistic drive of the company. This is often reflected by the incorporation of live jazz musicians into performances and is a key element which sets BOP apart.

Dollie notes "Jazz music and jazz dance have always stood together. The creative connectivity between Paul's music and my choreography is paramount to a successful creative outcome."

As the company name suggests, BOP is an inclusive collective which has featured international dancers and jazz artists, united by their pursuit of creative excellence. This is a fundamental truth of jazz, as Paul highlights:

"Jazz is the only art form that preaches true individuality and creative acceptance. The dance does not insist on a pre-defined physical aesthetic, and the music is not constricted by the

"Developing our practice together over decades, we both understand the fundamentals of each idiom, and have evolved a working process that enables a true collaboration, driven by artistic freedom and creative excellence."

**Dollie Henry**  
Artistic Director,  
BOP Jazz Theatre Company

conventions of the classical tradition."

For 25 years, the company has worked tirelessly to promote jazz in its innate artistic and creative form, educating through workshops, residencies, literary works and presentations. BOP remains largely self-funded despite its outstanding contributions to the dance sector. There is an undeniable lack of sustainable support for the jazz dance art form in the UK, yet this has not faltered the passion, desire and tenacity of the directors in keeping BOP alive.

Recent successes include *Spirit of Jazz* filmed at the Curve Theatre, Leicester, as part of Serendipity's LDIF Festival 2021. This mixed bill of new and legacy works reached international audiences, created in the midst of exceptional challenges as a result of the pandemic.

Jazz dance theatre is yet to have its moment in the UK, yet momentum is building for this formidable company, who are attracting new attention and developing a legacy which champions the ever-developing jazz dance art form.

**Further information**  
[www.bop.org.uk](http://www.bop.org.uk)