

Institution: Middlesex University
Unit of Assessment: UoA35
Title of case study: Shobona Jeyasingh: Enhancing cultural understanding through dance practice impacts in education and the arts
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Shobana Jeyasingh is one of a handful of British choreographers – and indeed, choreographers worldwide – who successfully choreograph work using a multiplicity of cultural techniques and methods. Having trained in the Indian classical form Bharata Natyam, Jeyasingh produces work that utilizes a mix of classical, contemporary, popular and site-specific techniques. Impacts are generated through her writing, mentoring, public engagement and performance works, as she asks audiences and dancers to re-think notions of authenticity, unchanging tradition, and binary identities such as Asian and British. While her workshops in schools and performance works in various British and European sites change perceptions of gender, ethnic identity and Indian dance, in a tour supported by the British Council and commercial sponsors, she has taken her diasporic, hybrid sensibilities to India, to convey a postmodern, multicultural British identity.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Shobana Jeyasingh is one of six associate research artists with ResCen, Middlesex. ResCen has, since its inception in 1999, investigated artistic processes, as well as the role of artists as citizens and representatives of a domain of knowledge. Through public events and dialogues with researchers, ResCen provides a context in which associate artists can deepen their research.</p> <p>Promoting culturally rich understandings of dance and the body, Jeyasingh has made more than thirty dance works over the last 25 years. She utilizes classical Indian movement practices as well as contemporary choreographic methods, to produce work informed by, and located in, urban cityscapes. Her work challenges how we perceive and construct modern identities. When audiences ask her what is Indian or British in her work, Jeyasingh interrogates the assumption that there is an ‘authentic’ past to which we are bound, and utilizing the ideas of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, proposes that tradition is as constructed and changeable as modernity. She educates Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company dancers to forego easy definition of Indian dance and tradition, and instead, question what E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger call the ‘invention of tradition’. Recent works include <i>Classic Cut</i> (2012), <i>Bruise Blood</i> (2009), and her site-specific works <i>TooMortal</i> (2011) and <i>Counterpoint</i> (2010). Her work has toured in Britain, Europe, North America and Asia. Over the audit period, regular ACE funding has enabled her to stage and tour new works and undertake educational work (circa £1,605,000, with committed ACE funding until 2015 of a further £550,000). Jeyasingh is also in regular demand as an educator, mentor and public speaker. Besides producing site-specific performances, Jeyasingh has led a workshop-tour in India (2010), workshops with young people at Mulberry School (2012), training and mentoring with emerging artists at Back to the Lab (Sadler’s Wells, 2013), Collolab (East London Dance, 2010), Choreogata (Southbank, 2011), and Choreographic Collisions (Venice Biennale, 2012), and contributed to the GCSE dance syllabus (2009).</p> <p>Through significant texts, web pages (www.ResCen.net) and DVDs (e.g., <i>Animating Architecture: Foliage Chorus</i>, 2008), Jeyasingh enables wide access to her creative processes and research. In the edited book <i>Navigating the Unknown</i> (Eds. Bannerman, Sofar and Watt, 2006), she describes, through conversation with Susan Melrose (Professor in Performance, Middlesex), how when dancing Bharata Natyam in Britain ‘you are immediately surrounded by the politics of cultural diversity’ (p258). Locating her research within a (post)postcolonial choreographic discourse, she discusses the influence of her classical Indian dance training and Rushdie’s essays in a radio essay for <i>Under the Influence</i> (BBC Radio 3, March 2011).</p> <p>The concerns of this research found resonance with Janet O’Shea’s work (former Reader at Middlesex). O’Shea focused on the politics of representation in contemporary South Asian dance and her outputs included a number of essays that addressed Jeyasingh’s work, including the monograph: <i>At Home in the World: Bharata Natyam on the Global Stage</i>, Wesleyan University Press (2007). Jeyasingh’s work has found connections with Alex Kolb’s (Reader in Dance, 2011-current) work on dance politics and with the discourses on international exchange in the DansCross project (directed by Prof Chris Bannerman with Jeyasingh as co-researcher).</p>

Her research is recognised internationally and is the subject of academic papers/essays, by dance scholars like Prof Valerie Briginshaw (*Dance, Space, Subjectivity*, Palgrave, 2009) and Dr. Avanthi Meduri (essays in *Asian Theatre Journal*, 2008, *Dance Research Journal*, 2011, and online). Briginshaw says that Jeyasingh, in her choreography, explores contemporary, urban subjectivity for Indian womanhood, 'illuminated by ideas about nomadic subjectivity'. As Jeyasingh says, making work that utilizes multiple techniques is not about 'choosing this or that, we are already in a situation where the interconnections are so complex...'. Many of her works place women in sites normally considered to be patriarchal, like the urban London business sector, and historical churches, and brings in feminist sensibilities that privilege sensory experience and interconnectedness over ritual and tradition. Reflecting on the responses to Jeyasingh's 2010 presentations and interviews in Delhi, Meduri notes that there is a 'diasporic aesthetic that is shot through with historic Indian references, in a personal matrix of her own making, this is the trace paradox that lies at the heart of Jeyasingh's work'. (http://www.rescen.net/Shobana_Jeyasingh/HmH/delhi.html).

3. References to the research (All materials available from Middlesex University)

Jeyasingh received international commissions to make work. She has written and influenced peer-reviewed articles and books, and a professional panel has selected her work to be part of GCSE dance curriculum.

Dance Works: (see documentation at: <http://www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk/works/#featured>):

Jeyasingh, S. "Classic Cut" (2012); UK tour in 2012, 20 performances watched by 4977 people, Commissioned by The Royal Opera House and The Point Eastleigh

Jeyasingh, S. Bruise Blood (2009-10); Toured UK, Scandinavia, Austria and India with 7 international performances, and 9 UK performances, with 6504 audience members. Premiered in Dance Umbrella (*for full documentation see REF2 for Jeyasingh*)

Jeyasingh, S. TooMortal (2012); UK (43 performances) and Europe (14 performances), 2618 viewers. Commissioned by Dance Umbrella, UK, Venice Biennale (Italy), Dansens Hus (Stockholm), Bitef Belgrade (Serbia). (*for full documentation see REF2 for Jeyasingh*)

Radio Essay:

Jeyasingh, S. "Under the Influence." Broadcast on BBC 3 on March 30, 2011 and July 17, 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00zt79r> or <http://www.radiotimes.com/episode/q8cd/the-essay-episode-5-under-the-influence>

Essays/Books:

Jeyasingh, S. 'Getting off the Orient Express', in Davesh Soneji (ed) *Bharatanatyam*, OUP (2010), ISBN-10: 0198083777.

O'Shea, Janet. *At home in the world: Bharata Natyam on the global stage*, Wesleyan University Press (2007), ISBN-10: 0819568376.

Bannerman, C. et al (eds) *Navigating the Unknown: The creative process in contemporary performing arts*, Middlesex University Press (2007), ISBN: 1 904750 55 9.

Web materials:

Jeyasingh, S and Avanthi, M. Home meets Home, ResCen, http://www.rescen.net/Shobana_Jeyasingh/HmH/delhi.html

DVD:

Jeyasingh, S. *Animating Architecture: Foliage Chorus* is published by ResCen Publications (2008), ISBN 0955059100.

4. Details of the impact

The research activity described above provides the basis for changing perceptions of classical Indian and contemporary dance, cultured bodies, and identities through performance, educational activities and mentoring projects with young people and emerging artists - engaging with up to

30,000 people across the UK and internationally each year – generating impacts with both reach and significance.

Contexts and Routes for Impact:

1. GCSE/GCE examination

In 2009, *Faultline* became a key work on the AQA GCSE Dance syllabus and, since 2008, Jeyasingh has been a set practitioner for study on the OCR A-Level Performance Studies syllabus. Jeyasingh has assisted the understanding of *Faultline* as a key work through the generation of educational resources, delivery of workshops and creation of video materials (see ResCen, Creating Character: http://www.rescen.net/Shobana_Jeyasingh/character.html#Un7D6I2vySU). Through 2009-2013 the company delivered 135 workshops for students studying company repertoire, for 2323 students; 8 Teacher Training and INSET days, for 95 teachers. The company has sold 1082 DVDs; and 9354 resource packs. Further resources are produced and sold commercially in collaboration with ArtsPool (CDRom/ poster and revision cards <http://www.arts-pool.co.uk>). Resource guides include texts by Hodder Education publishers: *AQA GCSE Dance Teacher's Guide with DVD-ROM + CD* (2009) by Howard and Percival and *OCR Performance Studies for A Level*, (2008) by Pymm, Deal and Lewinski. Plus, *The Dancing Times* published a GCSE study aid on *Faultline* by Sanders (2010, 100/1199).

2. Education workshops and a flagship project at Mulberry School for Girls

Jeyasingh undertakes needs-based workshops with school-age groups based on her choreographic practice. She aims at allowing students a space in which they can explore and embody identities that reflect their lives and the urban spaces in which they live. At Mulberry School in Whitechapel, in 2012, Jeyasingh worked with 300 students using Kalaripayattu workshops, and with 12 students for a site-specific project that was attended by 120 students. She worked with 13 students for a curtain raiser project performed at the Royal Opera House. In 2013, she undertook an artist residency there, where the company worked with 24 students. As a girls school, with an almost exclusively Bengali Muslim student population, the students say that they find Jeyasingh – an Asian woman, with an independent and successful dance company, who works with both Asian and contemporary dance styles, without feeling the need to label components of her work – an inspiring role model. In a three-day residency the company used contemporary choreographic and creative methods to rehearse and perform a five-minute work in the school's new theatre space. The head teacher finds Jeyasingh's contribution unique, saying that in the difficult days of low arts funding, Jeyasingh makes time and finds funds to work with young women at the school who have a love for dancing, but who don't always find parental support for their dance ambitions. She says that young people are 'global citizens' and face unique challenges for defining their identities, and Jeyasingh's work has taken on this challenge and produces globally-aware work that instinctively understands modern identity. Jeyasingh's patience in working with the students, her ways of empowering them, her lack of interest in labels such as Asian, British, traditional, modern allow the girls to explore hybrid identities, and gain confidence in their bodies. For her school work with girls, Jeyasingh often gets students to use work with strength and power as motifs.

3. Mentoring

Jeyasingh regularly undertakes facilitation and mentoring roles in contexts that enable her to challenge artists to reconsider cultural definitions through embodied work. Recent mentoring projects include: *Collolab workshop*, East London Dance agency (2010), *Choreogata*, Southbank (2011), *Choreographic Collisions*, Venice biennale (2012), *Back to the Lab – Breakin' Convention*, *Sadler's Wells* (2013).

The latter of these projects brings Jeyasingh's particular interest in the choreography of the urban to the fore. *Back to the Lab* attracts dance makers with no formal training, as is typical of street/ hip hop based dance. In 2013, Jeyasingh mentored four emerging hip-hop choreographers, and facilitated their translation of a street dance style, that is made up of multiple dance/music styles and histories, on to a theatrical stage. Each of these choreographers worked with five dancers and produced a ten-minute dance piece, based on the two-week training and mentoring with Jeyasingh. 180 audience members watched these works-in-progress, one of which was in May 2013, performed at the Breakin' Convention and attracted 1600 audience members.

4. Public engagement

Besides dance work and workshops, Jeyasingh is actively involved in public engagement activities, including forums, paper presentations, and TV and radio talks. In 2012, Jeyasingh presented a paper 'Looking for the Invisible: The Abstract in South Asian Arts,' at Akademi. In 2011, she delivered a key note at Trinity Laban for a symposium called Passion, Pathways and Potential in Dance; delivered lectures to MA students at the London School of Speech and Drama and the University of Sheffield. In 2010, her process was filmed and broadcast on the national TV channel in India, Doordarshan. In the same year, she presented talks at Dansensus, Stockholm; contributed to a post-show talk about Indian choreographer Chandralekha at the South Bank Center; presented papers at Max Mueller Bhavan, Delhi, at the NCA in Mumbai and The State of the Arts conference in London, and workshops at The Bangalore School of Music in Bangalore and Gati Festival in Delhi. Within each of these contexts audiences/participants reflect upon and question attitudes and perceptions of cultural difference and tradition.

5. Professional dance practice

The Artistic Director of Dance Umbrella says that Jeyasingh has an enormous impact on the dance profession, by creating new audiences, and by experimenting with classical South Asian forms. She has produced enormously influential work that challenges conceptions of tradition and modernity, self and other, East and West. In addition, she was the first choreographer to successfully make work that extended the boundaries of a classical form. In many international projects, like an EU-funded commission to make site-specific work, a tour of India, a collaborative exchange between UK and China artists in Danscross 2009, Jeyasingh is chosen to represent UK choreographers. In addition, her work often challenges gender definitions, and produces a feminist reengagement with historically patriarchal sites.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Individual corroboration:

- Artistic Director, Dance Umbrella
- Head Teacher, Mulberry School for Girls
- Director, Cultural Partnerships, King's Cultural Institute
- Projects Manager, Breakin' Convention, Sadler's Wells

Newspaper Reviews:

Jeyasingh's work has been critically reviewed internationally and by all the major newspapers and specialist professional publications, including; Guardian, Telegraph, Times, Stage, Dancing Times, Dance Theatre Journal etc. For examples see reviews by Sanjoy Roy, the Guardian (which also includes a list of further selected reviews), at: <http://sanjoyroy.net/?s=jeyasingh>
<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/oct/20/shobana-jeyasingh>

Film Documentation: Available from Middlesex University.

Jeyasingh Dance Company at Mulberry School, Video Documentation. Back to the Lab (short video), Sadler's Wells <http://www.breakinconvention.com/videos/breakin-convention-back-lab-2013-shobana-jeyasingh>

Arts Council Reports: Available from Middlesex University. Confidential reports by Arts Council by reviewers; Theresa Beattie and Rachel Harris.

Essays on Jeyasingh's work: Available from Middlesex University

Avanthi Meduri 2008 "The Transfiguration of Indian/Asian Dance in the UK: Bharatanatyam in Global Contexts" *Asian Theatre Journal* Vol. 25 No. 2 (Fall) pp 298-329, 10.1353/atj.0.0017.
 Avanthi Meduri "Traces and Trails: Faultline and Bruiseblood in India/London India," http://www.rescen.net/Shobona_Jeyasingh/HMH/Delhi.html

Awards:

Asian Woman of Achievement 2008, for contribution to Britain's cultural life
<http://awa.realbusiness.co.uk/article/57-2008>