

# Annual Conference

9–11 April 2013, Harrogate International Centre



## **Peter Lovatt**

**Dance Psychologist, University of Hertfordshire**

### **Dance Psychology: Health, Thinking and Hormones**

At the Dance Psychology Lab we study the psychology of dance and dancers. In this talk I will give an overview of three areas of our research. **Dance and Health** It is clear that dancing is good for our health. Recently a link has been observed between dance and Parkinson's disease, such that dancing appears to reduce certain Parkinsonian symptoms. We have been examining this link in a series of experimental studies in an attempt to understand what it is about dance that helps to reduce symptoms associated with neurodegenerative disorders. **Dance and Thinking** People think differently when they dance. We have found in laboratory studies that different types of dance have specific effects on the way we solve problems. I'll show you a couple of different dance styles (you can join in if you want to) and explain how each effects the way we think. **Dance and Hormones** It seems that the way people move and, more importantly, dance is influenced by their hormonal and genetic make up. I will give you an overview of the literature in this area and explain how dance is thought to be used as part of the mate selection process.

**Dr Peter Lovatt** is a Reader in Psychology and a Principal lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire, where he heads the Dance Psychology Lab. Before starting on an academic career Peter was a professional dancer.

Peter studied Theatre and Creative Arts at East Herts College before training in dance and musical theatre at the Guildford School of Acting. After graduating Peter worked in most of the UK's number 1 theatres and on the international dance circuit. Peter left full time theatre to study Psychology and English at Roehampton Institute, and graduated from the University of Surrey. He then took an MSc in Neural Computation from the Centre for Cognitive and Computational Neurosciences at the University of Stirling (funded by a SERC scholarship), and did his doctoral research in the department of Psychology at Essex University (funded by a University Teaching Fellowship). In 1998 Peter joined the Research Centre for English and Applied Linguistics, at Cambridge University, as a Senior Research Psychologist. After a spell in industry, as a Principal Research Scientist for a speech-based R&D company, he joined Kingston University, where he was the co-ordinator of the Psychology Research Unit and Deputy Head of the School of Social Sciences. Peter joined the School of Psychology at Hertfordshire in September 2004.

Peter set up the Dance Psychology Lab in September 2008. The aim of the Dance Psychology Lab is to carry out psychology-based research in dance and dancers, to provide specialised consultancy, to engage the public in the psychology of dance and to explore, creatively, the relationship between dance as art and psychology as science.

Peter is actively engaged in promoting public engagement with psychology. In the summer of 2010 Peter wrote, produced and performed “Dance Doctor, Dance! The Psychology of Dance Show” which was performed for 23 nights at the Bedlam Theatre, as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. The show introduced audiences to four areas of dance-psychology research (Dance & Thinking, Dance & Emotions, Dance & Hormones and Dance & Health) using an interactive presentation style. During the show audiences engaged with the material by learning a hand-jive dance, disco dancing in the stalls and learning a special “Happy Dance”. At the same time Peter compiled “23 Feelings in Dance”, a series of 23 3-minute dance pieces portraying different sets of feelings, which was shown as part of “Dance Doctor, Dance!”. Peter wanted to explore further the way in which choreographers would be creatively inspired by psychological content and questions and so he produced INSPIRED Psychology:Danced with some amazing choreographers (Hagit Yakira, Ruth Mills, Sabine Klaus, Hannah Buckley, Dwayne Simms, Ema Jayne Park and Anne Marie Kristensen). The idea behind INSPIRED Psychology:Danced was to create a full evening of dance and spoken word, where the audience would hear about some key questions in psychology and see and experience how these same questions inspired choreographic work. INSPIRED Psychology:Danced was premiered on 26th May 2011.

Peter is a regular contributor on dance and psychology in the media. For example, he has appeared as an expert commentator on Strictly Come Dancing: It Takes Two (BBC2), Ask Rhod Gilbert (BBC2), Frank Skinner's Opinionated (BBC1), the Graham Norton Show (BBC1) and he has spoken about dance on the Arts Show (BBC Radio 2), Radio 5 Live breakfast show, the Lauren Laverne Show, The TODAY programme on BBC Radio 4 on BBC 6 Music and on BBC Scotland.

Peter's research into the psychology of dance has a broad and international appeal. Peter has been interviewed about his research extensively and his findings have been reported in serious and mainstream magazines (e.g. Scientific American Mind, Psychologies, Cosmopolitan) in the broadsheet and tabloid press (e.g. The Guardian, The Sunday Telegraph, The Observer and The Sun) on serious, scientific and local radio programmes (e.g. Radio 4's Today Programme, The Naked Scientist, BBC Three Counties radio) and on television (e.g. The Graham Norton Show, The One Show and GMTV). Internationally, Peter's findings have been featured in the American press and TV (e.g. Good Morning America), in Europe, Russia, India and Australia. Videos of Peter discussing his research have been very popular on-line. One of Peter's videos, which has sat on the BBC Radio 4 website for over two years, has appeared on the top 10 most watched videos on the BBC website.

Peter is frequently invited to give interactive talks at major science centres in the UK and abroad. Peter has given several TEDx talks (in Berlin, London and Oslo) and recently spoke at Sadlers Wells Theatre as part of TEDx Observer. Peter has also given lectures, for example, at the

Science Museum Lates, the Dana Centre, The Royal Institution, The Wellcome Collection, The Glasgow Science Centre, Science City York and the Edinburgh Science Festival.

Peter is currently writing a book on the Psychology of Dance, called Born to Dance, which is aimed at a general audience and he is in production with Tiger Aspect on a new show for Channel 4.

Dr Peter Lovatt is a Psychologist and a Dancer.

[http://psydb.herts.ac.uk/staff\\_list/FMPro?-db=staff\\_list\\_email&-format=recorddetail.html&-lay=details&-sortfield=surname&-max=2147483647&-recid=33629&-findall](http://psydb.herts.ac.uk/staff_list/FMPro?-db=staff_list_email&-format=recorddetail.html&-lay=details&-sortfield=surname&-max=2147483647&-recid=33629&-findall)