Angels in Wanstead

Shardae-Rose Angel

In the 28th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Shardae-Rose Angel

Shardae-Rose thinks she probably started dancing very soon after she learned to walk. By the time she was five years old she was taking regular lessons, and when her teacher told her mother that Shardae-Rose had potential she auditioned for weekend classes in Central London. From there she obtained a scholarship for classes with the Royal Ballet and started going to the Central School of Ballet full time from the age of 14. On graduation into the highly competitive world of ballet she was given a place at the Swiss ballet company Cinevox, and over the next two-and-a-half years she toured with them all over Europe.

Now she runs her own company, Black Orchid, which provides theatrical dance services to corporations and private parties as well as providing modelling and brand representation services. They're a multi-skilled lot, and specialise in theatrical-style dances, including fire dancing, burlesque and cabaret.

"It's amazing to get paid to do what you love," she told me. "Now I want to put something back. Also it's something I've always wanted to do." That's why she started running dance classes for people over 50.

Scientific studies show that dance can bring numerous health benefits. As well as the benefits you would get from any regular well-structured exercise program – and the satisfaction that we all get from learning something new – dance helps the development of stronger bones, a healthier heart and lungs, improves balance and engdenders a huge reduction in the risk of dementia (and improvement for those who already have it).

Reading between the lines it seems that the cost of venue hire means that each class starts at a loss and it takes quite a while to make it break even. That's part of what makes starting over-50s dance classes such hard work. First she builds numbers in a class in one location and then, when that starts paying off, she invests extra money into the next location and starts the process again. She has been running classes in Buckhurst Hill and Woodford and is now looking to start in Wanstead in September (her classes run during each academic term). "At Bedford House [Buckhurst Hill] they told me not to get my hopes up, that they'd let me run the class but didn't think it would work. But it did. It's not just ladies who come, men come too. One had a bad injury for five years and started ballet. He recently told me he had no more pain and that he comes out of class feeling uplifted and wanting to use the day. It's such a nice boost when people tell me what they get from the classes."

Shardae-Rose also teaches dance to young people in schools, some as young as two. She has run to raise money for Cancer Research, which is her charity of choice because her grandfather died of cancer.

She smiled when she told me about her last marathon: "It was so hard. I have good stamina for dancing but running was completely different. Afterwards, I was such a wreck!"

"I love the charity shops in Wanstead," Shardae-Rose told me during our recent meeting at The Larder. She continued: "I love that I find great clothes in them and am helping other people too."

Shardae-Rose hasn't yet confirmed a venue for September's classes, so if you have an idea or would like to attend, do get in touch.

For more information about Shardae-Rose's dance classes, email **shardae-rose@hotmail.com**

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