

# DOLLIE HENRY & ALL THAT JAZZ

A forceful personality, the strongest dance technique and a belief in her work places **Dollie Henry** at the forefront of jazz dance and teaching in the UK today.

With a foot in the commercial world (this year she will choreograph and co-direct *Cinderella* at the **Theatre Royal, Plymouth** for **E & B Productions**) and a busy teaching schedule she is able to subsidise her own artistic creation, **B.O.P. (Body of People)**.

Currently the company receives no government funding or commercial sponsorship but survives as a professional group of 22, combining dance, live music and song.

Quoting some of her main influences, the link with **George Balanchine** is evident in the use of shape and symmetry and the strong connection with **Bob Fosse** is undeniable.

This fusion of technique gives her jazz style a unique, yet recognisable form making her pieces visually entertaining while avoiding the more "introvert" performances of some contemporary companies.

Her opinions on dance training in the U.K. are, by her own admission, somewhat contentious, claiming that much of the jazz taught is either a diluted,

over-commercialised street style, or teachers of contemporary dance are attempting to teach jazz, thereby failing to recognise the form as a separate technique.

True jazz technique as it has evolved over the years is being lost. Henry believes that teachers with performance experience are needed in place of, or as well as the large number of career teachers now in the system.

She also feels that dance students are often made to believe that they can never make the grade, the level of technique becomes unattainable, but those who have performance experience and who understand the lives of working dancers know that this world is very different from the academic enclaves



Photo by John Ross

Above: Dollie Henry performing *Love Man*.

where much of the teaching takes place.

Of course, dancers need strong technique but they also need to recognise and develop their own particular strengths and personalities. No two dancers are the same.

Whilst bemoaning the lack of financial support, B.O.P. continues to knock on doors. Its expanding repertoire includes works to the music of **Louis Armstrong**, **Miles Davis** and **Duke Ellington**, the latter *Kinda Dukish* in collaboration with musician **Paul Jenkins**, was recently premiered at the **Cochrane Theatre** as part of a *Black History Month*. A future project is *White Folks*, this time including **Ray Schell**. Workshop auditions have already taken place for this piece based on a retelling of the *Bible* in hindsight.

With the arrival of *Fosse*, due in London next Spring we will see the work of Henry's greatest influence.

Jazz dancing as we once knew it is back and London has its own link in the chain of evolution from Africa, through the Americas, via burlesque, the Hollywood musical and right up to the current traditions of R+B and hip-hop - it's all jazz!

