



Above left, a shoot for the BOP Jazz DanceXercise DVD. Right, Dolie performing "Lover Man" from the BOP Theatre production *Dizzy Heights*.

else happens and you can't dance."

Following a successful six-year period in London's West End, Dolie entered a period of change, "In 1994 I took myself off to America. I had the opportunity to meet and work with many inspirational black choreographers and directors including Judith Jamison, George Faison, and Dianne McIntyre. That experience allowed me to come back to England and say, 'It's happening there; why isn't it happening here? What can I do as a black individual to make it happen here?' I'd always wanted to show jazz dance with *live jazz* music so it could be understood that the two art forms did work together."

Dolie was delighted when in 1995 she was commissioned to create for the project *Nubian Steps* at the Southbank Centre, initiated to promote and recognise black choreographic talent in the UK. "I created *Touches of Miles* which was based on and inspired by the music of Miles Davis and his album *Kind of Blue*. I'd had this idea in my head and in my body and in my soul for many years, so being able to get it out on six wonderful dancers, put it on stage as part of *Nubian Steps*, and let people see it with a live band, well, I was in my element."

Body of People (BOP) was born in 1996: "It had been a dream for such a long time – obviously since I went into the playground with a tape recorder! But I knew that to do it I first had to go out and find who I wanted to be. I had to learn, I had to graft, I had to see what else was out there and work in such a creative way

as to fuse everything I'd learned together into one package: The Dolie Package.

"[*Nubian Steps*] was when I realised I could have a company and that people would 'get' it because I saw the audience's reaction, their applause and even saw people cry! I wanted people to see Dolie the choreographer, Dolie the artistic director, so I had to get myself off the stage. It was a challenge. I didn't have as much money coming in, I was the mother of an eight-year-old child and I had a mortgage. But I think as a creative person sometimes you just have to take that plunge. I've never not done anything because I thought I couldn't."

Thirteen years on, BOP is still going strong. In 1999 Dolie met jazz musician and composer Paul Jenkins, "I'd found my soulmate creatively but I'd also found my soulmate as a friend and as a partner. He had his own company and his own studio in North London and was producing music up there." They joined forces, taking BOP from purely jazz dance to a jazz theatre company. "We kept the name of BOP but put all our assets, knowledge, experience and love of jazz into one pocket. It opened so many doors and also meant we could create original jazz music to dance to, which was very special."

BOP's philosophy is all in the name. "The beauty of jazz is about everyone coming together. I wanted it to be open for people to come in and feel they were part of a company. Some people might

think because they're not black, they can't do it. But we're living in the 21st century. Jazz is for everyone. BOP is about providing a place for jazz artists who are looking for something more than the commercial realm. It wouldn't matter to me if it was an all-black company, an all-white company, or a mixed company. If you've got the love, the spirit and the passion, I'm interested. You have to have a modicum of talent of course, and an extreme amount of technique, but if you have that and can run with it, you're the right person for me."

BOP receives no state funding so keeping the company can at times, Dolie admits, be a struggle. However, she is just as ambitious and determined as she has ever been. "At the moment there are ten in the company but it does change because we can't afford to be full-time. My next dream is to be able to pay dancers for six months, to really be able to concentrate on full-scale jazz ballets, then to go on tour. Until that happens, I will continue doing what I'm doing: working to establish a world for artistic jazz dance. I expect a lot from my dancers and from the students I teach but I expect a lot more from myself and I will never shy away from hard work." ■

Visit bop.org.uk for more information about the company and to purchase Dolie's recently released DVD *The BOP Jazz DanceXercise Program Volume One*, which we reviewed in the March issue of *Dancing Times*.