



To me, dance is an art form that triggers emotions and feelings like no other. For that reason, it can help unlock the secrets, emotions and yearnings inside us, whether we're trained dancers or ordinary bi-pedal beings. Our film, which documents the groundbreaking work of the Battery Dance Company with young people around the world, is incredibly satisfying for me as a filmmaker. I've seen how dance is both a way in and a way out. It provides an opportunity to explore important issues viscerally and emotionally through the best language on the planet, the movement of the body. No words. Just expression that comes from mind and body talking to each other, connecting the inner life to the outer world. As we return to the basics of human relationships — movement, touch, listening, storytelling, creativity, self-expression — something transcendent is communicated that breathes hope for a better, more humane future. And as race, religion and ethnicity divide people the world over, we hope that the film will show that we can connect with each other through something fundamental to all humans: movement. The beauty of this kind of expression is that it is unpredictable. It is an exploration, and for me, it's thrilling, a bit scary and ultimately deeply rewarding for those who come along with us for the ride.



Synopsis

For 40 years, the Battery Dance company has been a force on the New York and international scenes. In hundreds of performances and workshops in American schools, they've not only moved audiences but changed thousands of young lives. Seeing dance as a universal language, founder Jonathan Hollander created Dancing to Connect, in which his dancers travel the globe to teach the tools of creativity to youth who've experienced war, poverty, sexual

violence, extreme prejudice and severe trauma, enabling them to express their feelings and stories through dance.

They've led workshops in over 60 countries. MOVING STORIES follows them to four: India, with girls victimized by gender violence and sex slavery; Romania, with young Roma from one of Europe's worst slums; South Korea, with North Koreans who risked their lives to escape; and Iraq, with a young Muslim dancer in a country that forbids him to perform.

The dancer-teachers are diverse: Clement from Ghana, Mira from small-town Texas, Sean from the low-income projects in Brooklyn, Tadej from Slovenia.... As they encourage their students to move, then dance, then create their own dances, we see how each approaches the challenge with both trepidation and high expectations. Not surprisingly, the rigors of training their own bodies are vastly different from the patience and passion needed to inspire young people.

But they're not just teaching. They have just one week to take young people who may be enemies, who may have been abused, who may be fearful, who may not want to move at all, to a place where they not only express themselves through dance but perform for their communities.

From Day 1 to Day 7, we see both progress and setbacks in each group. Conflicts occur when students refuse to move or work together or seek to undermine the teacher's authority. Yet there are moments of connection, when teachers and students share something that transcends culture or country. And as connections are formed, bridges are built from Brooklyn to Baghdad, Slovenia to India, Ghana to Romania, Texas to North Korea.

Interwoven throughout is the story of a passionate Iraqi dancer named Adel, who reaches out to BDC from Baghdad after hearing about the workshops. From afar, Jonathan takes Adel under his wing and his dancers teach and mentor him in a most unconventional way – via Skype. After six months, they finally meet in Jordan. But what ultimately happens is a shock.

The film climaxes in performance. The joy afterwards is palpable, as the journey has transformed not only students but teachers.