

# The Culture Project



Photo credit: Johan Persson

Welcome to The Culture Project. This is a platform for everyone at New Adventures to learn how we can be more inclusive within our working environment. As a company, we strive to continually grow, learn and nourish new practices as we work together in this changing world.

Our hope for The Culture Project is that, as a leading international dance company, we implement change at an organisational level, as well as offer support for all members of the New Adventures family through training and actively implement best practice into our professional and personal lives. This document is a work in progress and should be read alongside the Company Handbook and Company Policies.

This is a platform for us to check-in and embrace new ideas that will help us build a better understanding of our colleagues' unique needs. On [this link](#), you will find an introduction to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access at New Adventures and an ever-growing 'Resources and Toolkit' document, which offers information on a variety of topics, including mental wellbeing, anti-racism and menopause and links to resources such as the Employee Assistance Programme.

Every 3 months, we will share 'The Culture Project – Edit' with you, this is a concise, online 'magazine' with insightful articles and interviews on topics within the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Access field. We will also include book recommendations for further reading. In this 'Edit', we are celebrating Black History with Blue Makwana and talking menopause with Etta Murfitt and Jennie Green.

I hope you enjoy it and that you will find this resource of some use.

*Glenn & The Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Access Group x*

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

1 - 31 OCTOBER

In the United Kingdom, October is Black History Month (it's celebrated in February in the United States and some other countries). The month is a focal point for commemorating the rich and diverse histories of Black people and for highlighting the achievements of Black leaders who may have been forgotten or overlooked.

This year the theme is 'Saluting Our Sisters' - honouring the achievements of Black women.

Black women have been at the heart of social justice movements throughout history, courageously battling oppression and advocating for change. However, their accomplishments have frequently been neglected or forgotten. Black History Month 2023 offers a significant opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the outstanding achievements of black women by focusing on honouring the matriarchs of movements and saluting our sisters.

<https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk>

The theme of Celebrating our Sisters emphasises the vital role black women have played in shaping history, inspiring change, and building communities.

This year's commemoration will feature trailblazing black women who have made incredible contributions to literature, music, fashion, sport, business, politics, academia, social and health care and more. Through the Black History Month Magazine and online platforms, voices, stories, and achievements will be amplified, inspiring future generations to carry on their legacy.



**SALUTING OUR  
SISTERS**

# Celebrating Black History Month with Blue Makwana

**Romeo & Juliet dancer, Blue Makwana salutes her mother as part of this year's theme for Black History Month**

**The theme for Black History Month this year is Saluting Our Sisters. Is there someone who has served as an inspiration in your life?**

My mother, Michelle Ballentyne, has been a huge inspiration throughout my life. She has been a beacon of light and has consistently been someone I look up to. Our relationship goes past Mother and Daughter. We are fortunate enough to be industry colleagues, which is often exciting and incredibly meaningful.

Michelle is an ex-professional Dancer and is currently the Project Lead of Ballet Futures: The Pipeline Project at the English National Ballet (ENB). Michelle teaches Ballet and Contemporary Dance at many of the leading vocational Dance Colleges and Conservatoires across the country and she is also a mother to four children.

I have constantly been in awe of the work ethic that exudes from my mother. Her drive and determination have always inspired me. These amazing attributes have encouraged me to push forward, aim high and strive to achieve my goals.

**What does Black History Month mean to you?**

Black History Month is a significant calendar event that I am still processing, even at 25 years of age. I often ask myself many questions when I see promotional material for this month. One being, is it necessary? As much as I find it uncomfortable that Black History is mostly promoted throughout one month of the year (October), I do absolutely understand the importance of Black History Month. To me, it is merely another month that I work hard and continue to exist as a Black and Asian woman. However, it is another month that I notice there to be more public acknowledgement of our existence, whether authentic or not. Black History Month does come with an increase in visibility. With visibility

comes opportunity. With opportunity, there is hopefully change, improvement and positive acknowledgement of our existence which from my experience, is something Black people are constantly fighting for.

**What can people do to help celebrate Black History Month?**

I believe people can help ensure that the resources shared, and knowledge imparted throughout Black History Month, continue to seep into all months and into everyday practice. I believe by doing so, permanent change happens as opposed to adopting temporary habits. This is how we move forward, and this is how we elevate.



Photo credit: Kasam Aziz

## How do you think the industry is working to find underrepresented dancers?

I see multiple fields within the industry working in different ways and at different speeds with regard to increasing the visibility of underrepresented dancers. However, I do believe it is important for us to recognise that dancers do not appear out of thin air. It is important for people from underrepresented backgrounds to be exposed to the arts from a young age, which will hopefully have a long-lasting impact on what the range of dancers looks like in our industry. A great example of how this is being thought of and actioned is through The English National Ballet's (ENB) project, Ballet Futures: The Pipeline Project.

Michelle (Project Lead for Ballet Futures) notes that this was created and devised to address the lack of diversity in classical ballet.

*"The aim of the programme is to contribute to, and promote, a diverse classical landscape by proactively encouraging and incentivising more children from traditionally underrepresented groups, to be involved with classical ballet."*

Now in its first official year, Ballet Futures is working in association with five dance schools across England. Young dancers who display great potential from the ages 8-12 are carefully selected through an audition process. If successful, they are then provided with support and guidance from Ballet Futures, leading them on a path that could potentially enable them to embark on a professional dance career. The schools they are already attending provide their dance training and Ballet Futures provide uniforms, shoes and additional attire they may require for their training journey.

The Associated schools and the Ballet Futures dancers also have direct access to the ENB Company, which includes visits to Mulryan Centre for Dance, opportunities to observe the Company dancers in their daily classes and rehearsals, theatre trips and the chance to learn about many other aspects involved in the running of a professional ballet company. The Ballet Futures team also maintain a connection to the schools by conducting two yearly visits with Michelle and Ballet Futures facilitators. During these visits, the schools and selected dancers will partake in a Ballet class, a repertoire session, a coaching session and a black/Asian ballet history sharing. On top of this, they will also have a Q&A with the guest dance artists, enabling the young dancers to gain an insight into the life of a professional dancer. Ballet Futures is a great example of how progressive change is being made from early stages. It is a programme with an active drive to instigate change, which has the potential to be long-lasting and pivotal.



## Women in Black History

### Katherine Johnson

Katherine Johnson was a NASA mathematician who played a key role in several NASA missions during the Space Race, including calculating the trajectory needed to get the Apollo 11 mission to the moon and back.

As a black woman working for NASA in the 1950s and '60s, Johnson overcame social boundaries and racial discrimination. Her impressive career was the subject of the 2016 book and movie "Hidden Figures."

Katherine's intelligence and skill with numbers became apparent when she was a child. By the time she was 10 years old she had started attending high school.



In 1937, at age 18, Coleman graduated with the highest honours from West Virginia State College, earning bachelor's degrees in mathematics and French.

Johnson worked in a pool of women performing math calculations. Katherine has referred to the women in the pool as virtual "computers who wore skirts". Their main job was to read the data from the plane's black boxes and carry out other precise mathematical tasks.

While the racial and gender barriers were always there, Katherine ignored them. Katherine was assertive, asking to be included in editorial meetings (where no women had gone before). She simply told people she had done the work and that she belonged.

## Raven Wilkinson – The first Black Ballerina

One of the first African-American dancers to perform with a major ballet company, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo was a high-profile company that toured the United States in the 1940s and '50s, when the appearance of an African-American onstage as a Sylph or a Swan in the South could incur threats from the Ku Klux Klan. Though Ms. Wilkinson was lighter-skinned and encouraged to wear pale makeup onstage, she always refused to hide her race.

In recent years, she was a mentor and friend to Misty Copeland, who in 2015 became the first African-American ballerina to be named a principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre in New York, one of the nation's most important companies.



Photo credit: Maurice Seymour

## Lilian Bader (1918-2015)

Lilian Bader was born in 1918 in Liverpool and went on to become one of the very first black women to join the British Armed Forces.

Starting out as a canteen assistant at an army base in Yorkshire, she eventually trained to do instrument repairs, before becoming a leading aircraftwoman and soon afterwards earning herself the rank of Corporal.

Three generations of her family served in the armed forces.

When she left the Army to have children of her own, she retrained and earned a degree from the University of London to become a teacher.



Photo credit: Imperial War Museum (hi 53753)



## Talking menopause with Associate Artistic Director Etta Murfitt & Deputy Managing Director Jennie Green

**Menopause is a natural transition, and while it comes with its challenges, it's also an opportunity to celebrate the wisdom and strength that come with age.**

**Etta Murfitt & Jennie Green have given us an insight into their own experience, talking about the various aspects of menopause and how to manage its symptoms, stay healthy, and nourish your emotional well-being.**

**What were the first signs and symptoms of menopause that you noticed, and how did you initially react to them?**

**EM:** A feeling that I wasn't myself. Normally, I'm very energised and focused but I felt sluggish. I felt a sense of anxiety and I couldn't cope with my day-to-day work, even though I actually could. My periods were erratic and very heavy, I was bloated, had hot flushes, and suddenly had joint aches in my knees, hips and back and didn't feel as strong as before. I also had brain fog - I couldn't remember anything, and I had to start writing a list to

remember. I sensed that I was losing myself and that was incredibly frightening.

**JG:** For me, it was a slow creep of symptoms, and the most difficult ones to chart were the psychological ones of brain fog, memory loss, loss of libido and anxiety which all led to a big loss in confidence, particularly in a professional environment. I lost words suddenly or would lose my train of thought mid-sentence, it was quite scary, and it led to the point where I felt unable to speak in public which is something I've been comfortable doing all my life. That's when I knew I needed to do something about it. I also suffered from some hot flushes and rage, and sleeplessness was a big issue for me. I found having been a good sleeper all my life, suddenly I wasn't able to sleep then was waking very early and was unable to get back to sleep and that increased my psychological symptoms. My digestive system also went a bit haywire. It's a joy!

## Menopause



**Have you sought medical or alternative treatments for managing menopausal symptoms? Could you share your experiences with them?**

**EM:** Yes, of course, I tried all the alternative therapies: Black Cohosh, Magnesium & zinc, changed my diet and upped my exercise, but none of them worked. Nothing made me feel any better. There wasn't any information about menopause when I started having symptoms. I went to my GP who was incredibly unsympathetic and told me it was a natural part of getting old as a woman, gave me a leaflet and told me to just get on with it. I walked out of the GP practice and burst into tears as I felt I hadn't been seen or heard. I then went to a specialist menopause doctor who listened and said I wasn't going mad; I was perimenopausal. Phew - what a relief. I was prescribed bio-identical HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) which is oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone. It was like night and day. I felt like myself again: I had my vim and vigour back and my confidence came back. I still do have some symptoms but it's all much better. I pay privately for my HRT as the NHS doesn't offer bio-identical HRT just yet.

**JG:** I started noticing symptoms when I was 42 and dismissed a lot of them as I thought I was too young to be peri-menopausal. It also was happening in the middle of the pandemic when life was really upside down anyway, so it was difficult to work out what was going on. I finally did a lot of reading myself around symptoms and it was the article I read on the

Balance app of the 35 (!) main symptoms of menopause that convinced me to go to my GP. Also talking to people like Etta about my experiences. I was initially prescribed progesterone tablets and oestrogen patches on the NHS, but I didn't get on well with the progesterone so got a Mirena coil fitted instead which delivers progesterone topically and is important for womb health if you are still having periods. I had a long journey (1.5 years) to get my hormone combination right and to persuade the GP to give me testosterone, but for the last 6 months, I have felt like myself again - after 5 years!

**What advice would you give to other women going through menopause based on your own experiences?**

**EM & JM:** Take HRT!! Do your research, go to your doctor armed with your symptoms and express exactly what you want. Don't leave without what you want. If you can't or don't want to take HRT, do educate yourself as to the symptoms, particularly the psychological ones as many women are prescribed anti-depressants when they are not necessarily depressed, just suffering from hormone withdrawal. Also, talk to your friends and relatives about it and find out what their experiences have been. We are always delighted to have a good old menopause chat!



# Menopause

*“Friends are a massive support and there is so much information online now.” EM*

Have you made any changes in your diet, exercise routine, or lifestyle to alleviate menopausal symptoms? If so, how have these changes helped?

**EM:** I am aware that I have to keep exercising in order to alleviate some of my symptoms. I haven't changed my diet as such, but I try to eat as healthily as possible.

**JG:** I have changed the type of exercise that I do and have concentrated on weight-lifting and strengthening exercises like barre class (not the full-on New Adventures variety!). I drink much less alcohol than I used to as it really affects my sleep and general well-being.

**EM:** Yes, me too and I also do weight-assisted exercises and have a PT who understands about menopausal women.

Are there support systems, resources, or communities you have found beneficial in navigating this life stage?

**EM:** Friends are a massive support and there is so much more information online now than there used to be. Davina McCall has done loads of work in this area

**JG:** and Dr Louise Newson

**EM:** Dr Naomi Potter

**JG:** It's improved so much even over the last 3 years with all the TV coverage there has been. The app Balance is also really helpful in recording symptoms to then take to the GP.

**Menopause is not just hot flushes and periods stopping, it begins earlier than you might think.**

- There are approximately 13 million peri or post-menopausal women in the UK
- There are more than 30 recognised symptoms of menopause
- Perimenopause is when hormone levels begin to fluctuate and symptoms may appear, often in the early to mid-forties
- Menopause is 12 consecutive months without a period, the average age is 51-52
- Post-menopause is the years following menopause
- Symptoms last, on average, 4-8 years
- 1 in 4 will experience very few symptoms
- 3 in 4 will experience symptoms
- 1 in 4 will experience debilitating symptoms

# Do you know about EAP?

If you think you might need some support with menopause, or something else, our Employee Assistance Programme offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counselling, referrals, and follow-up services for employees. EAP counsellors may also work in a consultative role with managers and supervisors to address employee and organisational challenges and needs.

## TELEPHONE COUNSELLING

This involves weekly sessions with the same fully qualified counsellor. You can call from anywhere, provided it is quiet, and you are able to talk openly. It is convenient as it reduces the need for travel and makes it easier to fit in with work and other commitments.

## FACE-TO-FACE COUNSELLING

Face-to-face counselling takes place in a private practice or a confidential area. You work with the counsellor to identify problems and work towards solutions together. There are over 1600 counsellors across the UK and ROI so you will never have to travel too far.

## VIDEO COUNSELLING

This includes video counselling, instant messaging and voice chat. This is similarly flexible to telephone counselling and accessible from anywhere you feel comfortable. It is beneficial to those wanting face-to-face interaction but are unable to travel or limited for time.



Photo credit: Johan Persson

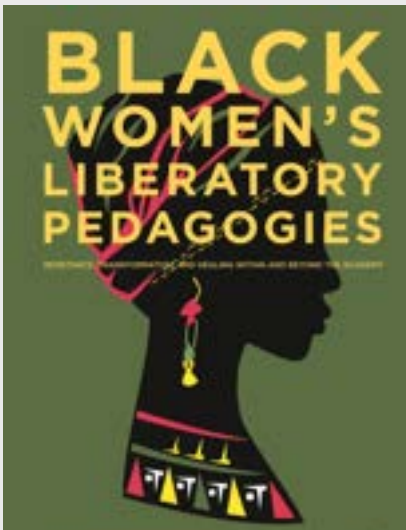
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## Books

Winner of The British Book Awards 2023 Overall Book of the Year, *Menopausal*, is more than just a book, it's a movement. An uprising. Menopause affects every woman, and yet so many approach it with shame, fear, misinformation or silence.



- Serves as a concise resource that synthesises the existing literature on black women's pedagogies in the academy.
- Includes voices of marginalised scholars who provide instrumental tools and strategies to combat microaggressions experienced in the classroom.
- Links theoretical approaches from multiple disciplines to practical applications for researchers and practitioners

*Black British Drama: A Transnational Story* looks afresh at the ways black theatre in Britain is connected to and informed by the spaces of Africa, the Caribbean and the USA.

Michael Pearce offers an exciting new approach to reading modern and contemporary black British drama, examining plays by a range of writers including Michael Abbensetts, Mustapha Matura, Caryl Phillips, Winsome Pinnock, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Debbie Tucker Green, Roy Williams and Bola Agbaje. Chapters combine historical documentation and discussion with close analysis to provide an in-depth, absorbing account of post-war black British drama situated within global and transnational circuits.

