

Commemorating the Centenary through dance in Somerset Photo Clayton Jane

The grant will fund a new county-wide initiative called ‘War and Peace: Commemorating the Centenary through Dance’. This dynamic project will involve young people, schools, community groups, elder groups, professional dancers and music practitioners from across the county and beyond. The focus of the work will look at the real-life experiences of Somerset women and Kathleen Tacchi-Morris (founder of Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre*) during the First World War.

Four new creative commissions will be shared at a performance planned for November; these are:

- The Impact of War on Real Somerset Women: A top national choreographer will work with Taunton Youth Dance Company to create a piece examining the impact of the war on real Somerset women.
- Letters to the Front Line: A musical commission using archive footage, letters, documents and real voices from the First World War, created with Somerset Heritage Centre and TYDC students.
- Kathleen Tacchi-Morris: Women for World Disarmament: A new graduate dance company will be launched in the county (with auditions taking place in May). The group will create a new work focussing on Kathleen Tacchi-Morris and her journey from RAF worker during the First World War to ardent peace campaigner.
- Family and the Home: The final commission will focus on this theme and will be created and performed by Bolder Dance Company (open to over 50s) drawing on their own oral histories, family memories and experiences.

Everyone participating in the project will have access to the Tacchi-Morris archives and the resources of the Somerset Heritage Centre, where they will be shown how to explore local history and carry out research, helping them learn about

heritage as well as informing characterisation and performance and the understanding of issues facing women at the outbreak of the First World War; project activities will be documented on a blog which will give more information on the research processes and the creation of work using the historical stimulus.

The project will become part of the HLF-funded Somerset Remembers platform which will be holding events in Taunton Town Centre. The dance pieces will compliment the work being undertaken as part of Somerset Remembers, enabling the heritage of Somerset in the First World War to be better interpreted and explained

Jenny Copping, Artistic Director of TYDC, said: “We are delighted about news of the grant. This project offers fantastic opportunities across the county and will enable us to commemorate the centenary in an imaginative way that captures the public imagination. The project will pull in a variety of local partners including Somerset Heritage Centre, The Museum of Somerset, The Tacchi-Morris Trust and many others.”

Louise Lappin-Cook, Director at Tacchi-Morris,said: “This is such an exciting initiative that really pulls together the community - professional composers and professional dancers, youth and emerging companies and schools. TYDC have been creating some phenomenal work so we are really excited about this next phase in the company’s development as well as opportunities for the graduate company to tour schools across the region.”

Explaining the importance of HLF’s support, the head of HLF in the South West, Nerys Watts, said: “There are so many stories that make up the complex history of the First World War and we are committed to helping communities across the South West research their wartime heritage. Through this imaginative project, local people will be able to explore the impact the war had on their County, particularly the little known stories of Somerset Women during the conflict, in new and engaging ways. ‘War and Peace’ will make a fascinating addition to the wider HLF funded Somerset Remembers activity happening to mark the Centenary."

Notes to editors

Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre

* Kathleen Tacchi-Morris (24 January 1899 – 12 May 1993) was the founder of Women for World Disarmament (WFWD). Tacchi-Morris was also a dancer who appeared in several silent movies.

Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre is a multipurpose space that provides arts activities for the whole community. We offer over 160 nights of live performance, and over 600 hours of community classes per year. Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre was developed through support from Kathleen Tacchi-Morris and continued support from the Tacchi-Morris Trust and Heathfield Community School. Core to our being is continuing the legacy of pacifism that echoed throughout every aspect of Kathleen Tacchi-Morris’s life.

Taunton Youth Dance Company

Taunton’s premiere youth dance company creates cutting-edge work with up and coming young dancers aged 15-25. It was established and has been based at Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre for the past 10 years. TYDC dancers have the opportunity to work with a range of guest choreographers and performers as well as attending free dance performances. Former TYDC Company members have gone on to study at Trinity Laban, London Contemporary Dance School, and Northern School of Contemporary Dance. Former company members now perform within professional dance companies around the world.