

# World-famous ballet school partners with Woolwich Works



Cuba's prestigious Acosta Dance Foundation, spearheaded by world-leading ballet star Carlos Acosta, has announced a partnership with Woolwich Works. The arts hub, which already plays home to Luca Silvestrini's Protein dance company as well as immersive theatre company Punchdrunk, National Youth Jazz Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra and Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair, will house the Acosta Dance Centre. The professional Acosta Dance troupe will use the site as its rehearsal space, and a British branch of the Acosta Dance Foundation, which is committed to providing free dance classes to children in underprivileged areas, is also in the pipeline, *writes Holly O'Mahony...*

While the Acosta Dance Centre itself will launch later in the year if all goes to plan, the Acosta company has moved into a building within the Woolwich Works complex, where it's offering an adults dance club, with nine different classes – salsa, contemporary and ballet yoga among them – for £8 per class. They've also launched a community engagement programme, 'Rise up and dance', delivering this for free to schools around Greenwich, with a plan to offer more dance for local children from September.

Former professional ballet dancer Javier Torres has taken on the role of Managing Director of the Foundation. The position arose at the perfect moment for Javier: he received the call from Carlos while

in his final season as a professional dancer last year, during which he was also completing a masters degree in business administration as a contingency plan for what to do next.

Carols and Javier have shared the stage several times over the years, both at Cuban dance festivals and for gala performances here in the UK, but the launch of the Acosta Dance Centre in England marks the start of their professional partnership.

"My job has been to restructure the organisation and strategise the expansion into the UK, opening the Dance Centre here in Woolwich later this year," explains Javier when we speak. In Cuba, the Acosta Dance Foundation offers three years of

free ballet training for kids from underrepresented backgrounds. Exactly what the UK branch will offer is yet to be determined, however Javier reveals it will run on the same mission as its Cuban counterpart: to inspire a dancer in every home.

It was his own upbringing that inspired Carlos to set up the Foundation. He was plucked from a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Havana and put into dance classes, which eventually led to him becoming one of the foremost names in ballet around the world. Today, as well as running his own company, the 49-year-old is also the director of Birmingham Royal Ballet. Through the Acosta Dance Foundation, which was established in 2011, Carlos hopes to offer



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others similar opportunities.

Javier's journey into dance was largely inspired by his parents. His mum was a radio actress in Cuba and his dad a director in theatre, radio and TV. As such, a culturally rich life was always on the cards, but like Carlos, he's committed to offering young people the opportunities he had.

If the Acosta Dance Foundation in Cuba is the first pillar of Carlos's business plan, the Acosta Dance Centre in Woolwich is the second, with a third digital pillar hoping to reach international dancers and audiences in the near future.

Why Woolwich? "Woolwich is a great place to be at the moment. It's a

new, trendy area, [and] expanding with Carlos's name here will be an opportunity for the dance sector to see Woolwich as the UK's new dance hub," reasons Javier.

"We want people around the world to have a connection with dance and experience what dance can do for you to change your life. *Dance is not an elite art form.*"

*Acosta Dance Foundation at Woolwich Works, Artillery Square, Building 40, 1 Royal Arsenal, Woolwich SE18 6BH.*

*For more information about dance classes or schemes and opportunities being run by the foundation, visit: [www.woolwich.works](http://www.woolwich.works)*