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DU Dance (NI)'s founding Artistic Director Mags Byrne to step down after 24 years

Mags Byrne, the founding Artistic Director of DU Dance (NI) for over 24 years, is to step down in 2026 to focus on research, project delivery and allow her time to travel.

Under her creative and committed leadership, DU Dance (NI), based in Belfast and working across the island of Ireland, the UK and internationally, has become a vibrant, progressive dance development company highly regarded for its work at the cutting edge of dance and community development.

Working through the medium of contemporary dance theatre, DU Dance (NI) has constantly pushed the boundaries of where and with whom dance has value. The company's work focuses on young people but involves people of all ages and abilities. It was founded on and epitomises the distinctive approach that dance is a means of bringing about positive individual and community transformation, raising self-esteem, facilitating integration, and promoting attitudes based on tolerance and respect.

Mags Byrne has worked professionally in dance for over 35 years. She has performed and toured with many contemporary dance companies and choreographed and mounted projects for groups and companies all over Britain and Ireland, as well as in Austria, Ethiopia, Germany, Indonesia, Palestine, Romania, South Africa and Switzerland.

As Artistic Director she has played a vital role in delivering non-competitive, collaborative dance projects in a variety of settings - from youth centres to cathedrals, from car parks to international stages - and the work is rooted in community partnership, co-creation and a belief in the power of dance to inspire change. She leaves an incredible legacy behind, including:

- large scale dance performances such as the Opening ceremony for the World Police & Fire Games, eMERGENCY and most recently SHIFT in August 2024
- ongoing intercultural dance projects in Dungannon and Belfast, intergenerational work in Ballycastle and projects with young carers
- Northern Ireland's first boys only dance group Belfast Boys
- major annual dance festivals Unanimous, Primary School Dance Festival and Day of Dance

Commenting on her departure, Mags Byrne has said: "I am excited to see how DU Dance (NI) will develop under a new Artistic Director and wish the whole team all the very best moving forward. As a founding director it is hard to leave, but the time is right for both me and the company and there are more challenges and thrills ahead, so we are all embracing the change."

Rosamond Bennett, DU Dance (NI) Chair added: "This is a significant moment in the company's journey, as we look ahead to a new chapter of leadership. Mags has been the driving force behind DU Dance (NI) for over 24 years, building on decades of experience in community dance across Northern Ireland and internationally. Her vision and commitment have shaped a company recognised for its inclusive ethos, high-quality participatory practice, and powerful, socially engaged performance work."

Mags Byrne will remain in post until a successor is appointed. DU Dance NI's recruitment for a new Artistic Director will begin in October.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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* DU Dance (NI) is a professional dance development company based in Belfast and working across the island of Ireland, the UK and internationally. Its aim is to introduce people to dance and the creative arts and to advocate dance as a tool for facilitating personal and social development. Its vision is to advance dance as an art form, build community connections and foster tolerance and respect. With performance as an integral part of the process, DU Dance (NI) provides access to innovative contemporary dance workshops and projects across communities, which may often have limited or no dance provision, thereby challenging traditional views of the relevance and value of dance. DU Dance (NI)'s principal funding is provided by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council.

* For further information please contact Morag Stuart at DU Dance (NI) on 028 9023 0877 or morag@dudanceneni.com

* Photos attached of Mags Bryne with primary school pupils staging a mock Viking invasion of Stormont as part of *Reach.In Out* programme, 2007. Please credit headshot to Joe Fox with copyright to DU Dance (NI)