

# The Fountain

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Above: One of the winning entries in this year's Christmas Card competition. Design by Lada Gosteva, Year 8

## In this issue:

Year 8 Faith Trip to Bedford  
Cats vs Dogs - School Survey  
Christmas Card Competition

Page 11  
Page 13  
Pages 20-21

Staff in the Spotlight: Mrs Greaney Page 23  
Year 8 pupil in Magical Honey Pages 26-27  
Autumn Term Sports Round-up Pages 32-39

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## Year 8 pupil in Magical Honey

It all began at the Orchard Park Community Centre. A few dance students from my dance school, Sanskruti (including me) were selected to take part in a professional dance production called Magical Honey. It was the recipient of The Stobb's New Ideas award in 2021.

Magical Honey is about this girl called Maya who loves to read and draw and is super enthusiastic about school. But when she meets the celestial being Saraswati, she learns to unlock the true magic inside her. Together, they go on a journey of exploring their beautiful world and fight the evil headmistress, Miss Tusra. This show is a family-friendly show suitable for children aged 5+. It includes South-Asian dance called Bharatanatyam, live music, magic tricks and wonderful interactions to engage the audiences!



First stage of R&D in 2020 at Orchard Park Community Centre in Cambridge

We have been working on this production since the year 2020. For two years, Magical Honey has been in its stages of research and development and started touring in 2023. This has been an exhilarating experience along with some steep challenges sandwiched between enriching, artistic exploration. What I loved most about Magical Honey was choreographing the dance elements. I think of this whole project as a cake. We



Magical Honey team at R&D rehearsals at Cambridge Junction in summer 2021.

started with the base and worked our way up by adding layers to make the filling and topped it up with the final decorations. This has been such a fun process and it is wonderful to see how this production has evolved over time.

My biggest challenge from this was spending some of my school holidays in the studio. During half-term holidays, we as young performers would spend our day in the studio working with professional artists. I had never worked with them before and it was lovely to see how they exchanged ideas and tried them with me and my fellow young dancers. They were inspiring and made dance even more joyful for me. The lunch breaks were the best as we would go out and eat ice cream! I feel grateful that I had this amazing opportunity at such a young age.

Another challenge for me was learning magic tricks as a part of the choreography. While I am learning Bharatanatyam and have some experience with the dance style, performing magic tricks was a whole new skill altogether. It took me some time to master them, but because of my supportive team, I eventually became confident and we solved the problem.

Apart from magic tricks, the show has original Western contemporary music. This is interesting because I am trained to do Bharatanatyam to Indian classical music. Initially, when I



practised the movement, I struggled to dance Bharatanatyam rhythms to Western contemporary beats. After several rehearsals, I finally nailed the rhythm and can now dance Bharatanatyam with ease to Western music. This has been a big artistic breakthrough for me as I have learnt to blend two different artforms. It was really amazing to listen to original music made for my show!

During the research and development phase, I would see the set designer sit in the corner watching us and sketching out ideas in her sketchbook designing our props and set. We also had a costume designer who would, from time to time, ask us to come over so that she could measure us and create our costumes.

Altogether, the research and development phase of Magical Honey has introduced me to the world of professional arts.

This is our first year that this show has started touring. Magical Honey premiered at Cambridge Junction and it has toured to venues such as Norden Farm Centre for the Arts (Maidenhead), The Hat Factory (Luton), The Corn Hall (Diss) and Dance Festival Croydon. It will continue touring in 2024.

For some shows, it would be an early start where we had to wake up at five in the morning, get dressed and leave for a long drive to reach the venue. We travelled with our set and costumes in a van and I could catch up on some sleep during the drive. Once at the venue, we would put on our makeup, warm-

Creative team at R&D sharing at DanceEast in Autumn 2021. L-R

Standing: Zoe (costume designer), Imogen (set designer), Ayesha (script writer), Krishna (director), Chris (dramaturg), Sherry (lighting designer), Ruth (assistant producer).

L-R Sitting: Performers - Freya (young violinist), Linnea, Sia, Ojasvi, Oishani (young dancers), Suhani (professional dancer).



up and stretch and get ready for the show. The first couple of shows I was obviously nervous but, over time, I grew confident and I can now perform in my sleep. Even though I perform the same routine in different venues, I still enjoy it because each performance is unique in some way. What makes me really happy is the reactions of the audience during the show. Each audience behaves differently. Some laugh at certain things that others do not. Some have a lot of enthusiastic children that are very keen on audience participation. But overall, what matters to me is that they exit the theatre with a smile on their face. That is what makes me feel proud.



Magical Honey was commissioned by Akademi (seed commission) and funded by organisations such as Cambridge Junction, Arts Council England, DanceEast, The Mercury Theatre, The Library Presents and Cambridge City Council.

Magical Honey has helped me gain confidence not only in dance but also in public speaking and acting. As a young performer, it is a dream come true, unleashing my creativity, which I cherish forever.

**Sia Nair, Year 8**

Still from Magical Honey show premiere at Cambridge Junction in May 2023. Photography by Simon Richardson