

When you first meet Beatrice Smythe, you are struck by her wonderful smile and her well-toned muscles.

'Performing on stage is one of the most exciting experiences possible. All the nerves and fright you feel in the wings just melt away when you face the audience. Although you are aware of a sea of faces watching you, this is not what you concentrate on. (1) ___ If you focus on this, then your dancing will look natural and unforced.'

So how did Beatrice get started? 'I began taking ballet lessons in a local school when I was six. My teachers felt I had talent but after 11 years of ballet, I realised I wanted to do something different. (2) ___ That was it! I had never seen dancing like this before and immediately decided it was for me. The following year I was offered a place at a London contemporary dance school where I completed a three-year course.'

Today Beatrice is a permanent member of *the Charmed Circle Dance Company*. But was it a difficult transition from studies to career? 'I was warned that the competition would be fierce. (3) ___ Applying for even the smallest part meant auditioning with dozens of others. Finally, I was lucky enough to be offered a trial period of one year with *Charmed Circle*, even though it meant working without pay. It was an extremely difficult period, as you can imagine.'

'I could have been tempted to join other dance companies on a temporary basis doing one-off paid performances. But this would have meant missing out on the chance to become part of the regular line-up of what is now one of Britain's leading contemporary dance companies.' (4) ___ But Beatrice's ultimate ambition is to make it to America, where the ideas behind contemporary dance were first pioneered and developed.

When asked about what it takes to become a dancer, Beatrice didn't hesitate. 'You have to love what you're doing, you have to keep pushing yourself to the limit and you have to be slightly mad, too! (5) ___ Most dancers will tell you how physically painful daily training can be. You also have to be extremely self-motivated'

So what does Beatrice particularly enjoy about contemporary dance? "Well, for one thing, contemporary movements are so different from those in other types of dance. In ballet, for example, the movements are strictly structured and you have to stick to them. In contemporary dance, however, the movements are more expressive and each have individual meanings in themselves. (6) ___ This makes them very moving experiences both to perform and to watch.'

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1 — Also, although the pieces don't tell a story in the way, say, a ballet does, they explore themes and issues related to our everyday lives.

2 — *Charmed Circle* regularly tours all the major cities at home and has also been to several European capitals, including Madrid, Prague and Berlin.

3 — Contemporary dance is often termed, more simply, modern dance, though some claim there are slight differences between them.

4 — Nobody would willingly put their bodies through what we do.

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