

MATERIAL MEN *redux*

SHOBANA
JEYASINGH
DANCE



Dance Resource



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Material Men redux Dance Resource

Developed by
Shobana Jeyasingh Dance and Deborah Galloway

Welcome to our dance resource for *Material Men redux*, Shobana Jeyasingh's latest work, touring in the UK and internationally in 2017.

In this resource, you will first find a short document outlining the work's main themes and creative process followed by choreographic creative activities to use with dance students, dance groups or in your own dance practice. The tasks have been created for students aged 14+ and are suitable for GCSE, BTEC and A-Level dance students. As you progress through this resource, activities become more difficult.

Part 1 of this resource has been particularly devised for dancers of GCSE age (14+). Part 2 of this resource is tailored to more advanced dancers of A-Level and BTEC level age (17+). Both parts feature activities directly applicable to the current dance curriculums as well as Arts Awards levels.

Where appropriate, music suggestions have also been included as well as links to more documentation on *Material Men redux* and its central themes.

Please promote this resource amongst your students and your peers, and feel free to share your own *Material Men redux* sessions through our social media channels.

We hope you enjoy this resource.



Alice Odin
Learning and Participation Manager

 @SJeyasinghDance
 ShobanaJeyasinghDC
 shobanajeyasinghdance
 shobanajeyasingh



About Us

Shobana Jeyasingh Dance has been delivering high quality dance education programmes in the UK for over 20 years. We aim to encourage and promote excellent dance practice in schools, colleges, universities and community groups through understanding and appreciation of the dance vocabulary and choreography of Shobana Jeyasingh.

Our exciting and creative Learning and Participation programme is focused on promoting individual creativity and is inspired by our company's unique choreographic process. We offer workshops, masterclasses, CPD training and projects in schools, colleges, universities and community groups through out the UK. All our sessions are delivered by our company dancers and dance educators who have worked extensively with a range of education and community groups.

To make a booking/further information, please contact:

Alice Odin

Learning and Participation Manager

alice@shobanajeyasingh.co.uk

+ 44 (0)20 7697 4446

www.shobanajeyasingh.co.uk/education

The story of *Material Men redux*

In *Material Men redux*, Shobana Jeyasingh weaves the shared history and personal stories of virtuoso dancers Sooraj Subramaniam (classical Indian) and Shailesh Bahoran (hip hop), both of Indian heritage. The men share a family history rooted in colonial India and the dark realities of colonial migration and plantation labour. During the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, millions of Indians were transported to plantations in the British colonies to work in conditions close to slavery in what is known as indentured labour. Sooraj's grandfather moved to Malaya (now Malaysia) to work as a supervisor in a rubber plantation, Shailesh's great-grandparents moved from remote Northern India to be labourers in plantations in Suriname, South America.

Classical Indian dance and hip hop

Both dancers perform in their known dance language: Sooraj trained in classical Indian dance techniques, Baratha Natyam and Odissi, while Shailesh is a hip hop dancer. In one part of the dance, the techniques of isolating and popping are used to suggest the denatured body. Sooraj's presence reminds us of the persistent memory of India and Shailesh mimics and copies his dance vocabulary. In their duets, they dance together in their own way but connect and come together in echoing movements and in physical contact and intimacy.

Indentured labour

The story of indentured labour is a dark one of injustice and exploitation. Slavery was officially abolished in 1833 in Britain but there was still a great need for labourers in sugar, cotton, tea and rubber plantations. At the same time, British commercial interests in India created famines as they replaced agricultural production with the growing of opium to send to China in exchange for tea. This meant that millions of impoverished peasants were desperate for work and a better life. Under the false security of a contract, many were recruited to work abroad and were offered a 'promised land' with only a vague idea of where they were going. Duped into being labourers, these indentured workers (known derogatively as 'coolies') embarked on a perilous journey across oceans - a quarter died at sea - to work and



[Click to view video](#)

live in very basic settlements, surviving on very little food and money. Only a few managed to save enough money to make the trip back to India. As a result, strong Indian communities, which still exist today, were developed in these foreign lands.

From 1834 to the end of WWI, Britain transported approximately 2,000,000 Indian indentured workers to nineteen colonies including Fiji, Mauritius, Ceylon, Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, Malaysia, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa.

The sari as a third character

The choreography takes inspiration from the dancers' background and roots to India, symbolised by the large colourful fabric, the sari. Just like the sari, those roots are shaken and tossed, as they journey to an unknown land. In this section of the work, Sooraj stands for home and Shailesh is the tenacious traveller who is torn from his roots. There is a sense of loss and sadness as home recedes and becomes a strange land.



The music

Material Men redux features a score by acclaimed Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin including sound design by Leafcutter John. It is played live on stage by The Smith Quartet. Elena Kats-Chernin spent two weeks in the studio with Shobana, getting to know the dancers and Shobana's way of working. The music score for the piece comes from that lived and seen experience she gathered there. Elena Kats-Chernin, who is from a Russian Jewish background also drew from her personal history to compose powerful music about migration, travel and memory.



Creative team details

Concept, Choreography & Direction

Shobana Jeyasingh

Composer

Elena Kats-Chernin

Set, Costume & Video Designer

Simon Daw

Lighting Designer

Floriaan Ganzevoort

Electronic Music

Leafcutter John

Live Music

The Smith Quartet

Production Manager

Sander Loonen

Dancers

Shailesh Bahoran

Sooraj Subramaniam

Choreographic activities



Part 1: Young dancers aged 14+, GCSE students

Duet

Inspired by the contrasting dance techniques of hip hop and classical Indian dance

Show your group the photographs for each technique taken from the choreography of *Material Men redux*, which represent the different movement language.



Facilitate a group discussion analysing the form and style differences, the physicality and the performance styles of these dance techniques. What are the main differences and similarities between them? Have some of your dancers ever performed similar poses, if so, how easy were they to replicate? Look at what the definition of hip hop and classical Indian dance, especially Baratha Natyam are. Can you see the reference to them in the photos?

Please note, all photographs are also available in large format at the end of this pack.

Click to view the larger versions

Activity 1: Improvisation exercise responding to words as actions

Warm up - 3 minutes

Music suggestion: Sinnerman (felix da Housecat Heavenly House mix)

Explore the following actions in terms of spatial directions, isolated body part initiation, levels and dynamics or speed.

TRAVEL TURN CLOSING IN OPENING UP/SPIRAL FALL JUMP STILLNESS SUSPENSION

Activity 2: Photographs to Inspire Creativity

5 minutes

Split your group equally into two halves.

Group A chooses hip hop inspired photographs & vocabulary.

Group B chooses classical Indian dance inspired photographs.

The following tasks will be done by both groups and inspired by the technique of the chosen dance genre.

- a. Dancers recreate the actual poses in the photographs of the group they've been put into.
- b. Dancers manipulate the actual photo by exploring a change in direction of the body, change of level and explore how to move in and out of the pose. i.e playing with stillness or fluid movement.

Activity 3: Word actions

approx. 1 minute per box (= ten minutes exploration)

Music suggestion: Nitin Sawhney - *Serpents*

The words below reflect the range of vocabulary in hip hop and Baratha Natyam. Explore the following actions and words through improvisation. When using the words, get the students to start with using their hands like a basic mime. Then encourage them to take the movement out of the everyday context and changing the body part initiation points to explore different spatial pathways i.e directly through, across or away from the body or as a floor pattern. Play with different speeds and qualities (do it violently, do it calmly, carefully, gently, jerkily, smoothly). Change the size, play with how the breath can alter the weight and suspension/fall of the movement. Engage the torso, not just arms and legs and change the levels and inversions (weight on hands or other body parts - not just feet).

<p>PRESSING PUSHING</p> <p>Push into space or press into body part connection. Use torso or knees as an initiation point. Explore the thumb press gesture which can represent a signature.</p>	<p>PULLING</p> <p>Pull imaginary lines that extend out of the body. Pull body parts i.e pull shoulder forward by using opposite hand. Pull thigh up into a balance on one leg.</p>	<p>LIFTING OPENING</p> <p>Explore open sculptured poses. Use body part connections to lift and open.</p>
<p>DROPPING FALLING CLOSING</p> <p>Drop or fall downwards, sideways or grow upwards using the whole body or with an isolated body part i.e dropping elbow to knee. Explore closed/twisted body postures.</p>	<p>JABBING ATTACK</p> <p>Fast, repetitive impact movement travelling through invisible lines in the body like Z or boxes or shapes out away from the body.</p>	<p>CIRCULAR MOVEMENT TURNS ROTATION ROLLS/SPIN/PIVOT</p> <p>Use alternate body parts as the central axis to turn around (hands, back). Explore rolls and turns followed by reverse turns and circular floor patterns.</p>
<p>FREEZE STILLNESS</p> <p>Balance in an upright pose or on one or more body parts (forearm and heel of one foot).</p>	<p>WAVES</p> <p>Energy which waves or pops along lines in the body (journey from the left knee to right shoulder using smooth or jerky movement).</p>	<p>GESTURES</p> <p>Use known Indian hand gestures (mudras) or create your own hand gestures. Explore gestures that reflect an emotion (fear, courage, sadness) or communicative gestures (warning others).</p>



Activity 4: Create a solo phrase which may include:

- movement selected from the nine boxes of actions and put into your own order
- movement from the photograph images as replicas or manipulations

Use your chosen music track as a stimulus.

Think about the order and how you use space and dynamics. Suggested length maximum one minute.

Activity 5: Duet formed by bringing together one dancer from Group A and one dancer from Group B

Using your solo material and adapt your use of space, directions and material to create a contact duet. See duet photos at the end of this pack for inspiration.

Play with incorporating the following points of connection:

- body part connections between the two dancers
- unison movement
- stillness and balance use of eye contact
- inversion (one dancer upright vs one dancer inverted)

Duet with prop

Material Men redux features two dancers on stage who are bound by their common family roots in India. A sari is a long piece of light cloth, worn by women and sometimes men in India. Saris are worn in everyday life although more elaborate designs are created for special ceremonies such as weddings. The sari the Material Men use to dance with reminds us of their ties to India, but it is also a strong part of the choreography: it is almost the third character of the piece.

The following task recreates a duet exploring the use of a prop. The prop used could be a sheet or a long section of material such as a curtain, a sari, a flag, a rope or a long scarf.

Music suggestion: Elena Kats-Chernin - *Butterflying*

Vocabulary: you may use movement vocabulary that has been created through the solos and duets in the previous activities and enable the prop to become the stimulus for new movement.

Set time for an improvisation session in pairs exploring the prop as:

- Something to bind the dancers together. Envelop and connect them. The dancers are a unit and work in unison rather than as individuals.
- A shackle or restraint holding one dancer back from freedom.
- A life-line. Explore lines in terms of ancestral lines passing through generation to generation, the passing down of genes. Explore life-lines in terms of support and nurture.
- National dress or as an item of clothing. Create your visual signature or identity through how you dress yourself with the prop.
- A monument. The pose or statue could explore sculpture in an abstract setting or representing a narrative idea, for example two human beings forging their way forward into new territory.
- Sail of the ship. Against the wind of the high seas.
- Circles of time. One dancer is the central pin, the other explores time past and time future in relation to the central pin.
- A response to the words shake, throw, gather, bind, wrap, disguise.
- Home vs Traveller. Home stands for stability, stillness and strong roots/ foundation. Traveller stands for flexibility exploring spatial pathways towards and away from home.



Suggestion for creating and setting the duet

Your duet may include the following or you may create your own narrative. Alternatively explore the duet as a fragmented collection of connections inspired by the improvisation task above.

Using the ideas explored in the improvisation above, select and set your material into a choreographed order.

Suggestions: Dancer 1 could stand for Home, Dancer 2 could represent the Traveller as per the last example.

Design your spatial pathway through the duet as a journey which has a start and an end point. Reflect on the journey of land, crossing seas and arrival onto new land when incorporating dynamics and use of focus.

Spatially start together. Create more space and distance between Home and the Traveller. At two moments, seek eye contact. This may be reciprocated or not.

This simple spatial task is inspired by the idea of home receding, revealing loss and sadness.



Part 2: More experienced dancers, A-Level and BTEC level

Solo: Arrival in the new land

Material Men redux includes a section where hip hop dancer Shailesh Bahoran is alone on stage. Inspired by the concept of the 'body denatured', this activity looks at depriving the body of its natural character, or its physical makeup creating physical alienation and distortion within the body's form and structure.

This mirrors the physical realities of plantation life and indentured labour where long, harsh and cruel physical work caused negative impact on the body.

This solo also expresses the loss of identity, culture and personal power most indentured labourers suffered.

Activity 1: Inorganic structure of a solo

Suggestion: use the themes explored in the piece, electronic music and words to complete this activity.

Music suggestion: Autechre - *Tri Repetae*

Uusitalo - *Odottava*

Four Tet - *My Angel rocks back and forth*

Each solo dancer writes the following words seen in bold below on separate pieces of paper. Mix the pieces of paper, words face down so you can't see them and put them in a line. Turn the pieces of paper over and discover the word order for your solo. After exploring your interpretation of the words and improvisation around the theme of alienation, create your solo to music.

Withdrawal

Tip: Connect three body parts and explore disconnection through one part, withdrawing and moving away from the other body parts.

Separation

Tip: Start with separating objects from one another as in a factory line setting. Add focus, looking at what you are doing. Choose alternate focus - stare blankly or choose another direction to look in.

Division/split

Tip: Split the body in half through the central vertical axis and create alternative movement on both the left and right side of your body. Or split through the centre of the body and explore movement in opposition in the upper body and lower body.

Breaking off

Tip: Set up a still posture and then break it. The break can be instigated by an external force, a build up of internal energy, weakness or use of weight with one body part being heavier and therefore overloading and creating the break or destruction of the initial posture.

Fractured

Tip: Invent the body as an exploding room - with body parts exploding away from a chosen centre. Look at the dynamics and ricochet effect.

Argument/dialogue

Tip: Divide the body into sections and explore an argument between those sections. Explore dialogue as call and response. Increase the speed to represent heat and friction. Crisis is when all body sections dialogue at the same time. Explore triggers: this is an individual repeated move which sets the rest of the body off into a fast overreaction.

Blank/emptiness

Tip: Explore the eyes as blank and expressionless orbs scanning.

Explore the sensation of a strong body emptying out or giving way. Play with repeating the loop of a strong body to an empty vessel. This could represent the repetition of a physically hard, exhausting and soul destroying work day.

Activity 2: Solo alienation: The body denatured

Stimulus: inspired by words and the theme of opposition.

The following word pairs explore conflict and resolution in the body and can be put in any order.

The first word in the pair explores the whole body as 'denatured' while the second word in the pair creates resolution. This solo reveals the power of survival in the face of adversity.

Create a solo investigating the following:

Dissolve vs solidify + resolve

Imagine the body melting and withdrawing from itself. Look at the idea of metamorphosis and change from one state to another through the process of dissolving.

Weaken vs enlarge/ extend

Explore trembling or fragile movement into energised movements, which increase in size and use of floor space.

Degrade vs promote

Explore body parts controlling other body parts through actual connection or spatial tension. Explore levels. Resolution can explore elevated movement including rises, reach, suspension and balance.

Cut vs closure

Explore ways of slicing through air and body, using slashing gesture to reveal what's inside.

The resolution of the movement returns the body back to the original form of neutral posture or a created posture which represents the whole.

Adaptation with a writing task

As part of the devising process, get groups of dancers to write these words and their opposites on a sheet of paper. Ask them to mind-map all the possible outcomes and ideas from the words rather than using the starter notes written above. They can also create their own opposites, which have grown out of exploring the theme of the 'body denatured'.



Activity 3: Group mutation

Inspired by a duet performed by both dancers where one dancer performs original movement and the other dancer mimics and copies, producing strange mutations.

Use the solos created from the previous task.

Music suggestion: Kronos Quartet - *Tashweesh* (*interference*)

Michael Riesman and Philip Glass Ensemble - *Einstein on the Beach* - *Knee 1*

Organise your dancers into groups of five to eight dancers.

Choose one strong solo in each group and get one dancer (Dancer A) to teach the others in the group their solo. Dancer A and the group break it down into six chronological sections.

Each dancer in the group (that is not Dancer A) chooses two sections of the solo, which will be performed in unison with Dancer A in its original form. The dancers in the group then individually mutate the remaining sections of Dancer A's solo by changing the size, rhythm or speed or developing their own corruption of the original material.

As Dancer A performs each section, the ensemble dancers perform their choreographic mutations or original imitations at the same time.

This should result in a group phrase with elements of pure unison and mutation.

Development

Devise the formation of the group. i.e line, cluster, X shaped scattered group, changing formations, etc.



Activity 4: Improvisation

Music suggestion: Four Tet - *Watching Wavelength* or *Wing Body Wing*

Jon Hopkins (Insides) - *A drifting up*

Split your entire group into two halves comprising of audience and performers.

Using the alienation solos (Activity 2) select an order for the group to perform their solos (each person can be given an order number or you can call out their name in turn).

As each soloist performs their solo, the ensemble imitate the material at the same time. Do this live without any time to practise. Then continue with each solo until all the material has been shown by the whole group.

Result

The audience watching this exercise will see the original material mutated naturally. Discuss and then swap groups.

Adaptation

Set up the same exercise as above but with two groups on either side of the space facing each other (hip hop dance battle style). Group A starts one of their solos (with the rest of Group A imitating behind) Group B responds with their solo (all Group B imitating behind).

Go through all solos with the lead soloist at the front facing the other group.



Activity 5: Trio mutation improvisation

(Higher difficulty level)

In groups of three, name three dancers, Dancer A, B, C.

Dancer A performs their created solo.

Dancer B describes aloud to Dancer C what they see Dancer A performing, using body parts/shape/ quality/ direction/ feeling and natural response to what you are seeing.

Dancer C (with his/her back to Dancer A) responds physically to the words and images presented vocally by Dancer B.

Swap roles.

If using an audience discuss whether there's any correlation between Dancer A and C presented live.

Examine how the vocal description of Dancer B helps the audience understand more or detracts from the experience.

Group migration & journey

The positive outcome of the narrative of *Material Men redux* is the workers' incredible resilience and how they survived in unknown lands creating strong communities.

Flocking in groups in silence

Stand in a clustered group (bunch of grapes). As a unison group follow the person at the forefront.

Follow the instructions move, stop, look. Experiment until all directions are covered with all members of the group having led.

The group aims to move as one unit, like a shoal of fish with no obvious leader.

Result

Group body listening and intense awareness and focus. A feeling of unison without counts or learned material. A feeling of the group being stronger than the individual.

Adaptations

Add in a move to a seated position (i.e lay down or crouch)

Add in a gesture. All the group follow these adaptations so the effect is unison group work.

Development

Music suggestions: Jonquil (Whistle Low) - *Parasol*

Ame – *Doldrums*

Toolroom Knights

Vocabulary

Group flocking as above and movement vocabulary inspired from the alienation solo or show the alienation solo in full.

As the group continues with flocking, each performer can find the moment to perform their alienation solo and then reenter the group.

Options

- The solos can be performed within the group at clean moments i.e when group are sat and still.
- As the group walks away you may be left to perform your solo. Experiment with ways to leave the group and re-enter the group. Each person tries to perform their solo at least once.





Coming together

This activity is aimed at Theatre and Dance students / physical theatre participants

Duet using vocal storytelling with gesture

Two dancers sit next to each other facing the same direction, facing different directions or back to back.

In twos write a short story inspired by the themes developed in *Material Men redux*, specifically migration and/or indentured labour. You both represent the 'present' (which is you now) as a survivor from previous generations of indentured labourers. Your story may be poetic, narrative driven or interview style.

Your story must speak in the past tense, present tense and future (which includes imaginative goals, aspirations, hopes and dreams etc).

Both of you read your story aloud in unison, create a gestural seated phrase which reflects your story, bringing it to life visually.

Speak your story aloud and physically perform your gestural story in unison.

Advanced task: decide who is Dancer A & B.

Dancer A is the past.

Dancer B is the future.

Both Dancers A & B are the present.

Both Dancers perform all the gestures together with the spoken word.

When the story is in the past tense only Dancer A speaks, when the story is in the future only Dancer B speaks.

When the story is in the present tense both dancers speak.

Be mindful of the rhythms of language following the rhythm of the movement. Make sure the words spoken aloud keep the real rhythm of conversation or dialogue.

Annexe





















Book a workshop

To engage in more detail with Shobana Jeyasingh's work, why not book a session with us? We offer a wide range of workshops, dance projects, masterclasses and residencies.

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Learning and Participation Manager

alice@shobanajeyasingh.co.uk

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