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THE INDEPENDENT

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Last Night's TV: Wonderland: Boy Cheerleaders/BBC2 The Apprentice/BBC1 Explosions: How We Shook the World/BBC4

By Reviewed by Amol Rajan

If those who proselytise on behalf of the Big Society have the slightest bit of common sense, they will ring up the BBC this morning, order several thousand copies of last night's Wonderland, and post them to every sceptic of plans for the regeneration of civic society with whom they are familiar. They'll find no finer example of the little platoons on whom they have staked their futures, nor of such a group doing so much good for such troubled children in such an affecting way.

In particular, Ian, the star of this show, and Cherry, his gorgeously blonde and fanciable sidekick, should be invited round for tea at No 10, and paraded in front of the Cabinet as paragons of virtue. James Newton's superb and compelling documentary introduced them as the coaches of DAZL Diamonds, an all-boy dance collective from Leeds. Their task was to hone the ambitions of all these little Billy Elliots towards a performance at national championships. But as the hour wore on, it became apparent that they were much, much more than mere dance teachers.

Each of the boys we met had single mothers and absent fathers. Nine-year-old Harvey's mum was 10 weeks pregnant with him when she got chucked in prison for 13 weeks for, as she put it with a rather arresting hand gesture, using her fists too much. Most of the other young boys, including a long-haired tantrum thrower called Elliot, had mothers who would be easily recognised by aficionados of Shameless.

Yet just as that programme's real achievement was to show the quiet dignity and patient virtue of the abandoned poor, so too were these mothers revealed to be utterly charming. Wanting the best for their children, they would use DAZL Diamonds as leverage: if you keep getting chucked out of school, I'll stop you dancing with Ian and Cherry.

It worked, unleashing the most extraordinary commitment, determination, and talent among children who seemed destined for a difficult adolescence. In the process, Ian and Cherry flitted between the role of surrogate parents and surrogate siblings. They adopted the former role when adult authority needed to be stamped on an occasion; and the latter when an open ear and childish solidarity were needed. The sequence in which Cherry went through the different looks that the boys needed to pull off - "the wink", "the pout", "the surprise look", "the man look" - was almost impossibly affecting in its generosity of spirit.

Repeated references to Billy Elliot show what an impact that character had on the imagination and lives of the post-industrial North. It was particularly moving coming from Harvey, who accounted for his own ambitions using that name, and whose implied apology when asked to explain why his father wasn't around - "we don't communicate with him... we don't have his number" - was cause aplenty to feel despair at his circumstances. When, later, Harvey practised his dance sequence in his bedroom, and then accounted for his nerves before an audition by telling his friend: "I was shitting my kecks when I got there", it was hard to avoid begging the television that he and the other Diamonds should win in the nationals.

They came a hugely respectable third, and the pride in Ian's face, which made him look even more identical to H from Steps (real name, coincidentally, Ian Watkins), was just gorgeous. So too was the final scene in this deeply moving show, which suddenly came over all Hitchcock. There was Harvey, jumping on a trampoline and reaching for the sky, but in the confines of his fenced-off garden, and surrounded by his mother and sisters. The camera panned up to the sky, and as the credits rolled we were left with the feeling that his escape from penury was written into the stars.


A very different set of apprentices were paraded in front of Lord Sugar for this, the second episode of series six and unquestionably one of the best yet aired. Our power women were asked to design and promote a beach accessory. What they came up with didn't pass muster, and the ensuing - sorry, it has to be done - catfight is quite a scene.

Karren Brady, excelling in her new role on the Board, asked if she could step in. And step in she did, reminding the candidates that they were representing the interests and ambitions of businesswomen everywhere. Immediately, they were reduced to a bunch of sheep, nodding with mock sagacity. As they left, Nick Hewer muttered that he was feeling "a bit numb after that experience", and then it was Brady and Sugar's turn to nod.

Sugar, it cannot be said enough, is the perfect TV villain, not only because by the series end he turns out to be quite nice, but because he doesn't realise he looks and sounds like a caricature of a boy done good, rather than the thing-in-itself.

Much of the charm of Explosions: How We Shook the World was owed to Jem Stansfield playing the role of apprentice himself. Clearly super-bright, he submitted himself to the wisdom of an assortment of geeks to explain the role of explosives in shaping human history. From the Chinese burning of bamboo sticks over two millennia ago ("to scare away shape-shifting creatures of the night"), to Franciscan friar Roger Bacon's experiments in the 12th century, the desire of gas to expand suddenly has driven scientific innovation. Only when we got to Hiroshima did its destructive capacity appear unbearable, and even then Stansfield's commendable clarity of explanation made for compulsive viewing.

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TV review: *Wonderland: Boy Cheerleaders* and *The Apprentice*

Despite their success, watching these guileless, pre-pubescent boys from a Leeds council estate was heartbreaking



Lucy Mangan
The Guardian, Thursday 14 October 2010

A larger | smaller



The boys' cheerleaders

team the DAZL Diamonds, from Leeds. Photograph: BBC/Quark Films

'I went on Facebook and it said 'What do you want to be?' It didn't come up as 'dancer'. It said 'basketball player', but I've never played basketball in my life.'

Fortunately for nine-year-old Harvey, it turns out that there are other options in life than those laid down by Facebook. And one of them is to join the DAZL Diamonds – a boys' cheerleading team, comprising other youngsters from his south Leeds council estate and led, very firmly, by coach Ian. The star of ***Wonderland: Boy Cheerleaders*** (BBC2), he guides them through the steps and routines they need to master in order to appear first on Basil and Barney's Swap Shop and then in the UK Cheerleading Championships against 13 other (all-female) teams. "Elliott!" he barks as one lad fights shy of undulating his body across the floor, "I want you to attempt the worm!"

With dogged determination and blunt affection he also steers them around and over the many pitfalls and obstacles that come with mastering a new skill. Gradually the boys learn to submit to authority, to place the group's cohesion above their own desire to skive and, above all, to keep trying until they have learned that elusive step, or pom-pom placement or appropriate facial expression. "You're CHEERING! Nobody wants to see an unhappy cheerleader!"

Between classes, the boys battle against their daily deprivations. Few have fathers still around. "My dad can't look after me any more," says Harvey. "If he comes and sees me [cheering] I'll be chuffed to bits . . . But I'm not really expecting it because he's got, like, loads of important things to do." Elliott's single mother, Alison, is clearly too worn out to be able to offer much encouragement when her son hits his worm-wall. "You're gonna have to learn it or give up," she says. He wants to give up. Ian, with his patented blend of sympathy and straight-talking persuades him back to class. "Running away's not always the way to handle things. You'll learn different skills wi' me, Elliott, I promise you. Now gerrin there."

For all the boys' exuberance – and their third place gained at the UK championships – it was a melancholy tale. You could see the hope – not of further dancing success, but of more distant, unarticulated dreams – fading from the eyes of the older boys, and the

sadness on the faces of the younger ones when they spoke about their missing dads. If there's anything more guileless than a prepubescent boy in front of the camera, I really don't want to see it. It's beautiful and it tends to break your heart.

On then, to something crap and heartless – the second episode of **The Apprentice** (BBC1). There wasn't much Orwell got wrong about his vision of the dystopian future in 1984 but with the invention of the daily two-minute hate, he did woefully underestimate how much loathing the citizenry would need to discharge per week. It is, clearly, at least 60 rather than 14 minutes.

Every year I find new depths to my hatred for the not-quite-human-beings that populate the programme. It is the darkest, simplest, purest hour of my week. Drilling down to hitherto undiscovered reserves of bile last night was Apollo, the girls' team headed by 22-year-old Laura Moore, who spent much of the episode crying about people not letting her talk. "As project manager I should have right of speech!"

The contestants had to design and flog a new beach accessory. The boys (I deem neither sex worthy of nomenclature associated with functioning adults – they have the combined mental age of a chrysalis) came up with the Cüüli. It's a towel that has pockets for your food and valuables and has the virtue of being a) no more stupid than any other beach accessory and b) not being what the girls come up with, which was an eight-piece plastic bookholder you stick in the sand to provide something called "comfortability" for all those times when two hands just aren't enough to hold a paperback.

Reliving the bitching, sniping, stupidity, self-pity, accusations, counter-accusations and recriminations that unfolded thereafter would aggravate my ulcer to a dangerous degree, so suffice it to say that the boys won, Laura went down in Apprentice history as the first leader to have secured no sales whatsoever, and Joy was fired for not pulling her weight, even though it should have been Laura for turning down an exclusivity deal with Boots that would have won the round. And for being a moron.

Aaaand . . . relax. Another splendid episode. I feel worse but I feel better.

Cheerleading: Why do boys want to wave pop-poms?

By **Vanessa Barford**
BBC News

Europe's only troupe of boy cheerleaders can be found on a tough housing estate in Yorkshire. What's more - they've just picked up a trophy at the National Cheerleading Championships.

Break dancing, street dance and hip hop - it is easy to imagine why some boys turn to the types of dance typically associated with edgy music and an urban vibe.

Less obvious is why cheerleading - which conjures up the image of skirt-wearing, pompom-parading girls doing the cancan at the sidelines of a football pitch - would appeal.

But with the Dazl Diamonds taking home trophies and new figures suggesting 37% of schools now offer cheerleading in PE lessons, is there a new craze for this unique blend of dance, tumbling and gymnastics?

Dazl Diamonds dance instructor Ian Rodley, 27, says TV programmes such as Glee, Britain's Got Talent and So You Think You Can Dance have certainly upped its cool credentials.

"With all the exposure, there is a massive influence in young people, it's up 100%.

"The wholesome American image has become fun and cool, it's like what happened to street dance with films," he says.

Mr Rodley says the cheerleading club - which is partially funded by Leeds' Primary Care Trust anti-obesity programme and comes under a bigger community project called Dance Action Zone Leeds - was set up to help boys in some of the most deprived parts of the city.

Its aim is to use dance as tool to improve young people's physical and mental health.

"Kids don't get many opportunities round here. It's about giving children from communities where there is not much something to do.

"Cheerleading involves lots of jumps, kicks and turns, tricks, stunts, dance lifts, poms, chants, voice projection and visual effects - it is high energy, like an art form.

"The kids learn routines, put on benefits or galas every eight to 10 weeks to raise money within the community - we ask people to pay £3 for a show.

"It gives them a sense of belonging, helps them work as a team, builds self-esteem and gets them fit. In schools, concentration levels have gone up - cheerleading gives kids a discipline they don't often get at home."

About 40 boys turn up every week, he says, and the boys groups are broken down into three to six-year-olds, seven to 11-year-olds and 12 to 15-year-olds.

The squad - 16 boys between the ages of eight and 14 - put in a good 12 hours a week training, even more in the lead up to a competition.

But what kind of response do the boys get from partaking in such a traditionally female-dominated activity?

Nine-year-old Harvey Pratt, from Belle Isle estate, says he loves cheerleading, but while his mother - who was in prison when she was pregnant with him - is proud, not everyone has been so accepting.

"I'm getting the feeling of becoming a Billy Elliot, because I dance, he dances. His dad don't like him to dance, my dad don't like me to dance.

"But then, further on in the story Billy Elliot's dad starts liking him, and he starts taking him to these auditions in London.

"And if my dad understands me, understands that I like doing cheerleading, it'll be like the entire Billy Elliot story," he says.

Joe English, 13, also from Belle Isle, agrees it has not always been easy.

"They used to call me camp, and poof, and gay, and all that. But then when I'm on a rugby pitch they go 'Oh, you're well rough!'" he says.

But Allison High, the mother of another Dazl Diamond, 12-year-old Elliott Morgan, says cheerleading has been "absolutely brilliant" for her son.

"It's given him confidence, personality, and he can take a laugh now instead of taking everything straight to the heart.

"It's been a good, good thing for him. It's totally changed my child. Yeah, somebody's took my kid and given me another one."

Alison Oliver, director of sport at Youth Sport Trust, says the great thing about cheerleading is it attracts children who might be turned off traditional sports such as rugby, cricket or football, perhaps because they lack hand eye co-ordination or do not like physical contact.

"It seem less threatening, and can give children the confidence to progress into other sports," she says.

"Plus clubs don't need to be too reliant on money, cheerleading doesn't require many facilities or much equipment - if people have access to music, they can do it."

She says the gender bias is not as extreme as some people think.

"Cheerleading is an athletic activity, certainly at a competitive level the complexity of moves and lifts are strenuous.

"It is more similar to gymnastics than it is to dance - and gymnastics has a very positive profile as a sport - it is close to that at the top."

The Dazl Diamonds also have history on their side. Until the 1920s, cheerleading was largely a male and all-American pursuit.

"When the men went away to fight in the first World War, women took over cheerleading and claimed it for themselves," explains Pat Hawkins, president of the UK Cheerleading Association.

More recently, famous faces such as former US presidents George Bush and Dwight Eisenhower and American actors Samuel L Jackson and Steve Martin have championed the sport.

Mr Rodley concedes cheerleading is not for everyone, but says it can be a lot more "open, more accessible" than other sports.

"Football is a skill, people go on and deliver what is learnt - cheerleading is more creative, the kids can come up with their own choreography."

The Dazl Diamonds are aiming high and hope to steal a podium position at the British Cheerleading Association's International Championships in December.

Mr Rodley says it is about inspiring some of the "raw" children and "making their aspirations feel more than just south Leeds and Milton".

"I don't think I could just go with middle class boys. Some might get teased to start with, but for others it's somewhere to get accepted.

"And if it inspires a child to be something else, if it improves their lives, that's what we are here for - it makes it worthwhile."

Boy Cheerleaders will be broadcast at 2100 BST on BBC Two on Wednesday 13 October. Or watch afterwards on [BBC iPlayer](#).



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Thursday, 14th October 2010

Leeds all boys cheerleaders star on TV

Published Date: 13 October 2010

Europe's first all-male competitive cheerleading squad are set for even more stardom. The Leeds-based Peewee Boyz are to appear in a BBC documentary tonight.

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It marks the latest success for the boys, p

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art of the DAZL squad, who

have already won major trophies at the British Cheerleading Association International Championships and appeared on MTV and the Cbeebies channel.

The boys' squad was founded by Ian Rodley, from DAZL, who now leads several of the scheme's programmes.

With support from head coach Cherry Brown and tutor Vicky Mawson, the squad is going from strength to strength.

Ian 27, said: "The documentary is about the boys' coming of age stories, overcoming difficulties in their lives like bullying. We even have our own little Billy Elliot who has got through the first auditions for the Northern Dance Company.

"The hype started when the article in the Yorkshire Evening Post came out in July last year.

"Since then we haven't stopped. It really has been an amazing journey."

The Middleton-based Peewee Boyz were set up as part of Dance Action Zone Leeds (DAZL), which is supported by NHS Leeds and Leeds City Council.

The project encourages children to dance their way to health and is part of a wider programme of work to tackle childhood obesity in Leeds.

As there is no formal funding the team rely on fundraising and support from local businesses to pay for uniforms, travel and competition costs. This year they have raised £20,000.

The classes, at the William Gascoigne Centre and Windmill Primary School, are for held for both boys and girls from three years upwards.

Ian said: "There has been a lot more interest in the sessions since the appearances in the media and there is even an adult session due to demand from parents wanting to get involved themselves."

Dr Ian Cameron, director of public health for NHS Leeds, said: "We have been staggered by the success of DAZL and in particular the work of the Peewee Boyz.

"Their achievements have helped break down some of the barriers that may have stopped young boys from

taking part in dance – an activity that may have traditionally been seen as only for girls."

The Peewee Boyz are: Harvey Pratt, 9, Josh Holt, 13, Elliot Morgan, 12, Nathan Miller, 12, Joe English, 13, Mackenzie Scurah, 10, Camyoe Mead, 10 and Scott Graham, 12.

More details on DAZL, including their classes, are available by calling 0113 270 6903.

* Wonderland – Boy Cheerleaders will be shown on BBC2 at 9pm.
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