

"Human-Dancer" biography by Alan Birchall



I was travelling to work early one Friday morning in October 2008 listening to Sarah Kennedy's early morning show, she introduced the last song of the show as "the new one from The Killers" not to be released for another six weeks!! I must admit I was blown away, whilst also thinking that it wasn't 'The Killers' that I knew - very different! I got to work and text Jacqui to check it out as I wanted to choreograph 'the dance to that song' I was convinced it wasn't new and that somebody would've already written to it, but that wasn't the case and it got me thinking....

I hadn't choreographed anything for a while as it was a time of change in my life. Also I felt the dance scene had declined and was becoming very mundane and dull, the dances seemed to plod along to dreary music, there was nothing around, in my opinion, that stood out or had any 'meat' to it!! HUMAN just lifted my spirits and reminded me of all the 'fun' we'd had over the years which was what I wanted to convey through my dance... I felt the Linedance scene needed waking up!!!

I started working on the dance as soon as I got home, there was nothing to upset the flow so no need for any tags/restarts... I had a blank canvas so to speak. The track at just over 4 minutes and needed to be 64 counts, it also had to be comparatively simple for want of a better phrase but 'interesting' enough to make it 'enjoyable'. It was also one of the early dances that Jacqui was involved in during the choreography so it holds very special memories for her... including moving the lounge furniture around so we could both dance it! Due to the speed of the track a little breathing space was required during the middle section, hence a few more conventional step combinations that would still allow plenty of movement, and there just had to be a backward triple turn, so in it went, then adding a bit of a breather came 'THE DIP' which just left a couple of neat combinations to complete the dance and 'hey presto!' jobs a good un!!

Some early memories of teaching/dancing Human-Dancer...

I remember a workshop at Sharon's (Burntwood Lichfield) just before the CBA's, where her class had learnt H-D when I first wrote it, so I wanted to 'add a bit' - this is where the 'on my knees' section evolved and just threw everybody! When we got to the Awards all Sharon's dancers surprised us by adopting this 'bit' whilst dancing alongside us!

I think the other most prominent memory from the CBA's that same year was Gary Lafferty telling me that H-D was going to be the last track of his set on Friday night and that we "had to be in the room" I had thought not many would know the dance as it hadn't been out long! Sure enough we were there, Gary announced "Human-Dancer" and we were near the front of the dance floor. I was aware that we had a line of dancers next to us and maybe a couple of lines behind, when I got a tap on my shoulder and turned to see Betty Drummond "Alan" she said "I'm a Human-Dancer virgin" I looked at her puzzled and asked "what's that?" She replied "Well I've learnt the steps but never danced it to the music" LOL "Good Luck" I replied "don't follow me!" When we turned to face the back wall for the first time during the dance both Jacqui and I looked at each other - the floor was packed it seemed like everybody in the room knew the dance - there were tears in our eyes. It was as if everybody had been waiting for a dance they could finally get to grips with and let their inhibitions go... absolutely brilliant!!!

During the following year the dance just seem to fill the floor everywhere we went - dancers started adding bits... I'd started mimicking actions for more of the lyrics, basically everybody seemed to be just having FUN which is everything I wanted!

I was booked to do an event in France that same year where we were given guidelines of what could and could not teach/play... 'No Pop, Only Country' and most of the dancers would be beginner/improver level so nothing too difficult... definitely not (I thought) HUMAN-DANCER!! So some of the dances we choreographed that year had country/pop alternatives. As I was also DJ for the afternoon session, we taught/played all country, a bit later in the day I played a Pop alternative for one of the new dances just to show the different feel - it was very well received. During the break we chatted with the dancers asking them if there was anything else they would like to learn/dance... they answered unanimously "HUMAN-DANCER" so that's what we did!!

The evening entertainment was a Live Country Band and to our surprise our afternoon dancers fit everything we had taught to suitable songs, including 'Human-Dancer' to Shania Twain's 'No One Needs To Know' and our Partner version of 'No More Cloudy Days' we both felt a heartfelt sense of achievement.

As the following year's CBA's grew closer it seemed very likely that H-D would be included in the shortlists, but I was constantly being told by people 'in the know' that it had no chance of an award as the dance had been around too long – who cares?? But Joe public, the people that actually matter, were saying different! It didn't bother me if it won or not... for me the dance had done what I wanted it to... it had brought 'fun' back to the dance floor... smiles on faces and the future of Linedance looked brighter again.

At the Awards we were sat with Gary & Marie Lafferty at the far end of room - a long way from the stage. We both had nominations, Gary for Dj of the Year and myself for Human-Dancer. Gary commented that being sat so far away there was 'no chance we had won' no worries being nominated was enough. As the ceremony reached the 'DJ of the year' I turned to Gary and said "that's yours" to which he shook his head, the look of shock on his face was priceless when his name was announced!! It was then time for the 'Intermediate Dance Of The Year' I'd got Maggie picked for this.. but total shock/surprise it was my turn to be flabbergasted... and I was!! A massive cheer went up in the room and I took the long walk across the dance floor. I don't know what it was, but half-way to the stage I thought this might be the last time I receive an award and I wanted to show just how much this one meant to me... I took a bit of a run and dropped to my knees and slid up the dancefloor punching my fists in the air!! As with any award it is always an honour to be nominated but even more so to win, this one for me was extremely special... it was a tough time in my life full of change and uncertainty, I was in a dark place, one that wouldn't go away for some time to come. The very last thing I remember from that night was going to the bar very, very late on and being told "I thought everyone had forgotten That Dance!" LOL

Throughout my many years in the industry there have been lots of people who have told me how special certain dances I have choreographed have been to them... how they have helped them through challenging times in their lives. I'm sure it's the same for other choreographers but it is very humbling to know that you have helped someone (often without ever meeting them) through a tough times in their lives through a 'dance'. It just goes to show how important our form of dance is with the release/enjoyment that it brings to so many, something I am very privileged and proud to be part of and what makes it all worthwhile. There's always someone ready & willing to knock you, but more importantly there are many, many more who respect and appreciate both you and your dances.

As for me - I just want people to have FUN - the main ingredient in ANY form of dance/exercise, without that it's just an expressionless tedious motion.

Thanks to many that continue to teach and dance and enjoy what we offer. It is very much appreciated.



Thank you everyone - Alan B

In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine Brandon Flowers described "Human" as "Johnny Cash meets the Pet Shop Boys!"

An interview in *The Observer* stated that the track is a "cross between New Order and Bruce Springsteen" Billboard also gave a positive review, echoing *The Observer's* description of "Merging a Boss-like melody over a New Order-injected rave-up!" also praising the song for "stretching the soundscape of alternative rock, which has increasingly become difficult to differentiate between mainstream rock".

In December 2009 it was voted the 25th Best Song of the Decade by listeners of a UK music station.