

BY TERRI PROVENCAL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEVAN CHOWDHURY

Movers and Shakers

Jevan Chowdhury loves things that move—cars, trains, people, and *dancers*.



Sometimes a transatlantic email lands in the right inbox the first time as was the case for Jevan Chowdhury. The British director emailed a query to Jane Robertson, Director of Cultural Tourism at VisitDallas, and she responded... immediately. Chowdhury wanted to continue work on his *Moving Cities* film project, which began in London in 2014 and only included European cities at that point. He needed her help to slate something in Dallas as the first American city. Its impetus—filming transportation and dance in its myriad forms within the context of the city—inspired Robertson, prompting her response: “Your tourism work is so interesting and a perfect partner for VisitDallas.”

Top: Olga Pavlova, Deep Ellum; Bottom: (left) Claude Alexander III and Kimara Wood, Dallas Black Dance Theatre, Deep Ellum; (right) Nycole Ray, Fair Park. All photography by Jevan Chowdhury taken August 31, 2016.

Her initial enthusiasm, a great deal of legwork, and tapping the right steering committee, evolved into *Moving Dallas*, an 8-minute film combining international performers with transportation and city life. The timing was perfect. The Dallas Convention and Visitor's Bureau would be "announcing their new identity" and released the video on December 1, 2016, to coincide with the name change to VisitDallas. "It was a wonderful way to expose our new name and what we are doing," she enthused.

The filmmaker describes *Moving Cities* as "a collection of individual portraits of each city and trying to explain the relationship between the movement of the city—the cars, the trains, the people, and the dancers. I'm curious about people, their identity, and how they move." In addition to film, Chowdhury produces commercials, branding, and animation as Director of Wind & Foster, a London-based creative studio he founded.

"I was born in London and I've always felt it's very machine-like; it's very mechanized because there's nine million people that live there, and they have to go to work every day," Chowdhury explained. "We have the cheap underground system and bus system and it's a miracle that it all works. We are all a part of those machines. Dropping a dancer into that zombie land is interesting because the dancer is doing the opposite by definition of free movement."

Through VisitDallas and an influential steering committee—all of whom studied dance or work within the dance community—*Moving Dallas* was filmed at 17 locations using 56 dancers from 10 dance companies and organizations. "You've got a really brave cultural and tourism bureau. I wanted to show the gritty side mixed in with the beauty," Chowdhury said.

From classical ballet to contemporary dance, acrobatics and southern swagger, the committee—Lily Weiss, Director of Dallas Arts District; Charles Santos, Executive Director of TITAS; Gayle Halperin, President Bruce Wood Dance; and Zenetta Drew, Executive Director of Dallas Black Dance Theatre—delivered. And so did Chowdhury. Using kinetic cinematography, he created something perception-changing for the world looking in. "The project has really waved the flag for Dallas in a way that I hadn't expected it to because it's shown a cross-section of society that I don't think people are aware of in Europe and elsewhere," he admits.

Through September 5, 2017, *Moving Cities: Dallas* appears at NorthPark Center in a gallery space between Louis Vuitton and Burberry, then the exhibit will move to the African American Museum on September 6 to coincide with the State Fair of Texas and continues through November 10, 2017. The exhibition features 38 stills shot during the making of the original video at places like DART stations, Ross Avenue, Fair Park, freeways, the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, and more. Celebrated dancers appear of course, such as Bruce Wood's Albert Drake, Russian prima ballerina Olga Pavlova, and Dallas Black Dance Theatre's Nycole Ray, "who could just take over a space," moving within construction, traffic, and urban life. But the film also included folklorico, hip hop, mariachis, and more. "They know themselves very well and are able to press a pause button on the city and go 'Hey, look at where you live.' They are trying to represent the humanity of living in this city."

Sitting at the Winspear Opera House, a site known to every performer in the video, Chowdhury reflects, "People here are exceptionally humble and very welcoming, and that makes all the glass and concrete and infrastructure obsolete." **P**



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