

THE DANGEROUS DOOR



Rob Fowler, you are an inspiration in more ways than one can actively recall by the time one has spoken with you, trolled you, and read up on you. *'I think I am unique'*, he says. Unique, indeed.

One's background cannot but help inform one's work. Rob's background is layered.

Back in the 1980s he played football, and he danced socially with his mother. Rock and Roll and Jive at the discotheques were his favourite dances and though he learnt technique as he watched some friends do Michael Jackson break dance moves, he was happy to do what he could. 'I could do body rolls, I could break the music to move with it, but I was nowhere as good as them', says Rob. They won competitions and Rob learnt.

Once upon a Time

THE DANGEROUS DOOR
by MONICA BHASIN

ROB FOWLER

<https://www.vtv.dance/channels.html>

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'My grandad was Irish and a fine ballroom dancer'. Rob cannot pin where his discernment of music comes from. His parents had regular jobs and never traveled more than two hours from home. They were far removed from the world of music and dance. His first dance partner Carol Cleary was a music teacher, and she helped him to understand music in its layers of lyrics, beats, timing and genre. It took him months to learn. Ethan Allen from the Cheap Seats, and his other musician friends often laugh at him when they see him breaking up songs into bars and bridges for his dances.

Pause. Travel back with Rob to see the evolution of Line dance in his trajectory. He tells me he went to bid goodbye to his Karate friends at the Holiday club. I refrained from asking details, though I learnt later in our conversation, that he had damaged his lower back when he crashed through a faulty floor and fell on a hard cement surface. Reporting, researching, and recording is tricky if you have to strike a balance between, being correctly informed, and being intrusive. He could not do Karate any more. They were teaching Country dance when he went to meet his friends there. Line dance was not known in the UK yet.

Two years after he started dancing, and it could not be an active career, because of his injury, he crossed continents with his interest in dance being the drive. Border crossing makes you a hero and he felt like one often. Reading his travelogue, I wondered if he felt he was the outsider, ever. Cultural rootlessness puts you on the margins and you look for connections. Unifying them all here was dance and beats, cultural sensibilities notwithstanding. *'It was a pilgrimage and that set me up for thirty years'*.

He traveled the Southern States of USA for three months to find dance in the local country dance bars, places where stars are born, places where you meet Line dance celebrities. When he met JoThompson at the WildHorse Saloon, a premium Line dance bar in Nashville, he did not know that she was Miss Texas or of her prized place in the Line Dance world. Gradually he found his relationship with places and people as he moved further up in his experience of the Rodeo. Transnational view of art forms brings panache and depth in one's growth. His repertoire of dance steps built up with each journey he took, the Two Step evolved into a variation of its original style.

Merry feet
Line Dance

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'I THINK I AM UNIQUE'

The warmth and hospitality extended to him, made it easier. We know he likes taking risks, at creativity, yes, for how else will brilliance be achieved, but risks with your life? He was whisked away by a stranger for a short stay on his American ranch, on his US tour somewhere near Indianapolis. The family was friendly and hospitable, but Rob was with no mobile phone or other means of communication. Really, Rob? The home could have been possibly unfriendly. 'I could have been murdered' he says casually.

When he returned home after his tour, he must have felt like Nostos - the greek hero. He brought in a wave, a difference in the way he perceived himself and his relationship with dance. He thinks back, '*there was no Line dance industry*' and no touring for dance choreographers in the early days. Music bands had been touring and singers and DJs were the stars before the 90s. Dance choreographers made an appearance for ten minutes before bands started playing for the evening. There were ten to fifteen dances that were danced to music played by these musicians. The 1990s changed it all. Dances started to become more intricate and choreographers were in the spotlight with names like Max Perry, Jo Thompson, Scott Blevins, Rachael McEnaney, Paul McAdam and Peter, leading the way. Rob's job was then to simplify their steps for social dancers.



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The most popular newspaper in the UK in 1994 published that the new wave in dance was Line dance, the hottest new craze from America. They featured Rob in a full page interview on the inside cover. He had just won the European championship in Blackpool. Rob's cutting edge work was recognised. The papers did not use the word 'Country'. All genres wanted to be part of this explosion, and everyone wanted to be in this melting pot of new concoctions.

Rob was choreographing advanced and intermediate dances by this time. There were no reference points and written dances. Dancers were following instinct and working on clever combinations. For Salsa and other partner dancers, it was strange to be doing similar footwork in Line dances with no partners to dance with. *In other words, every genre of dance found its representation in Line dance, adapted in the best and most clever way to the music of the day.*

He admired Scott Blevins for his path breaking work, twenty years ahead of his time. He was inspired by the legend. Engagement with creativity excites his intellect. He enjoys the difference in perception and cultural influences when he works on the Inspire, Challenge and Evolve, ICE, concept at VTV. He quotes a small example of the music I put up in his choreography class for approval. He is excited about the variation in the use of Indian instruments.

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