

To the Canada Council for the Arts

**Joint Presentation from the Canadian Dance Assembly (CDA) and
the Regroupement québécois de la danse (RQD)**

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The growth and professionalism of theatrical dance¹ in Canada is one of the proudest achievements of the first half-century of the Canada Council for the Arts.

In 1957, there were 3 professional dance companies who received funding support from the Canada Council. Over the last 50 years, our country has seen the national dance community grow to include over 100 professional companies, and 2,400 performing dance artists who present over 2,200 dance performances annually. 75% of these performances include Canadian content and reach more than 1.3 million audience members nation-wide. In 2005, there were 57 dance companies receiving annual operating funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, as well as over 100 independent projects receiving funding and at least as many more waiting in the wings. Dance continues to experience growing demand for Canadian work on the global market. We have seen real success and recognition internationally for companies like La La La Human Steps, Compagnie Marie Chouinard, The Holy Body Tattoo, Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Toronto Dance Theatre who are invited to perform regularly in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, South America and the United States. In addition, Canada can boast of having several professional dance training programs of international repute in post-secondary and specialized training organizations preparing new generations of professional dancers, choreographers, artistic directors, and dance teachers for professional careers.

Despite this remarkable success, there are a number of distinctive factors that make professional dance practice in Canada especially challenging, and which cry out for special attention from the Canada Council for the Arts.

The first of these is the relative youth of theatrical dance as a distinctive arts practice. Just as theatrical dance was the last of the performing arts to emerge on Western stages, so too was it

¹ The term 'theatrical dance' is referred to as distinct from social dance.

the last of the performing arts disciplines to emerge on the Canadian scene. As a result, the infrastructure supporting the professional practice of dance in Canada is the least developed of all the performing arts –an historic reality with serious implications for what is needed to support professional careers in the field.

A second factor is the relative disadvantage of the dance sector to benefit from the cross-subsidization enjoyed in the worlds of theatre and music from the technological advantages that have propelled the cultural industries, where by far the greatest investment is made not only by governments but by consumers and business interests as well. By contrast, dance is a three-dimensional live art form that needs to tour to survive –to reach the audiences that give it meaning and keep it alive– and in Canada, this means traveling great distances at great expense. Whereas a single concert of new music can reach audiences coast-to-coast through public broadcasting, with associated royalties and broadcast fees, dance must physically move from venue to venue, and still only reach a small fraction of the Canadian marketplace. The implications for reaching international audiences are even more complex –and costly.

A third factor requiring special consideration is the low level of dance literacy in the society at large. Just as it takes many years for a reader to progress from the simple pleasure of reading a word on a page to the complex experience of understanding great poetry, so too it is a long journey from recognizing a pirouette to fully experiencing the rich vocabulary of physical movement. The fact that children are taught in Grade 1 how to read but typically learn nothing about pirouettes in the public education system places a major restriction on dance in reaching out and connecting with the public. To face the challenge of not only creating and performing dance but also educating the general public to appreciate what dance can offer as a form of sensory, artistic expression is not simply daunting, it is totally unrealistic for our dance artists. It will require a massive investment in education, outreach, visibility and promotion.

A final factor meriting special consideration is the unique circumstances in which theatrical dance is practiced, including (in no particular order) :

- the short career of most dancers tied to the physical demands of the art form ;
- the long training period –typically upwards of a decade– to bring the body to professionally accepted standards ;
- the need for special spaces to train, rehearse and perform, including large column-free spaces, high ceilings, sprung floors, appropriate floor surfaces, a narrow range of temperatures (neither too hot nor too cool), change rooms with shower facilities, etc. ;
- the lack of venues that have the aforementioned characteristics. Dance is a homeless art form ;
- opportunities for daily training/structured exercise to stay in shape ;
- the need for specialized equipment including barres, training attire, specialized footwear such as pointe shoes, etc. ;
- access to teachers to lead exercises and teach repertoire, and other specialized professionals such as nutritionists, physical and massage therapists, among others ;
- for choreographers, the need for dancers, artistic advisors and associated infrastructure (such as time and studio space) to create new work and rehearse repertoire ;
- for companies, the administrative/management/marketing/touring infrastructure to present work to the public ;
- means to address the high cost of creation and production, stemming from the need to work with human resources in specialized conditions ;
- the augmented levels of outreach and audience engagement needed due to the lack of public literacy ;

- means to keep archival records of both new and existing works (e.g., rehearsal and performance videos, notation, costumes/set/lighting/sound designs).

The consequence of all of this is now clear. Despite significant historical support from the Canada Council for the Arts, professional dance in Canada is still sadly under-resourced.

- The Council's budget for dance creation and production roughly doubled from 1982 to 2002, to nearly \$12 million. However, during that time the companies being funded more than doubled, from 26 in 1983 to 57 in 2003. When inflation and other factors are considered, Council's contribution to dance company revenues has steadily declined from 26% of operating budgets in 1983 to 14% in 2003.
- The explosion of dance in the 1980's catalyzed an exponential increase in Canadian dance activity over the last 20 years. This period of significant growth occurred at a time when the Canada Council budget was flat lined. As Council's budget slowly increased in recent years, the impact of this growth has never been properly acknowledged or rectified by the Council.
- We know from the experience of our members who serve on Council's granting assessment juries that there are dozens of highly rated projects that are being denied financial support solely because of lack of available funding, as well as a number of excellent projects and meriting companies that are funded at inadequate levels, further marginalizing the sector.
- The impact of this significant funding decline, in artistic terms, means companies have less new repertoire, less rehearsal time, lower production values, and a startling 50% reduction in touring activity. This 50% decrease in touring activity also means that over the last 20 years, dance has become 50% less accessible to the Canadian public.
- While SSHRC minimum grant levels for research and creation in Fine Arts have increased to \$100,000, Canada Council maximums for short term dance project grants remain at \$30,000 even though it was determined by the dance section at Council in the

early 1980's that \$60,000 was the minimum grant needed to produce a significant Canadian work (at that time).

- The low proportion of dance companies that own their own facility restricts the visibility of dance companies as institutions in the community. (5% versus 20% for theatre companies).
- Attendance at dance performance grew strongly in the 1990's from approximately 1.1 million in 1993 to 1.5 million in 1998, one of the few cultural activities to record growth during that period.
- The number of people making a living in dance grew from 400 in 1971 to over 6,000 in 2001.
- While dancers have an average of eight years of dance education before their first professional dance performance, they earn an average annual salary of only \$18,000 from dance-related sources, compared to \$32,000 in the national labour force. In 2004, 51% of dancers earned \$15,000 or less, and the median was \$11,000.

These startling facts clearly illustrate that dance is at risk of losing the momentum and recognition it has established as an artistic practice. We will deny Canadians the opportunity to participate in our legacy unless we are able to adequately nurture the investment already made.

What an extraordinary opportunity, then, is offered by the new money allocated to the Canada Council for the Arts over the next three years to address the structural inadequacies of dance funding in Canada and elevate the status and dignity of dance artists to that of other professional performing artists in the country. This cannot be done with money alone, but by placing a strategic priority on investing in professional dance practice the Canada Council for the Arts can free up a host of other resources within society – both human and financial – and

signal the beginning of a new era for theatrical dance practice as significant as the founding of the Canada Council itself a half-century ago.

With this historic occasion in mind, the immediate priorities of the Canadian Dance Assembly and the Regroupement québécois de la danse, who between them represent the vast majority of professional practitioners in the field in Canada, are as follows :

1. Consolidate and recapture lost ground :

- To assure that choreographers have the means necessary to develop their craft and create powerful and important dances.
- To assure that our small, medium and large companies have the necessary infrastructure to support the creation, production and touring of excellent evenings of dance.
- To assure the dignity of the dancing profession through the full-time employment of dancers.
- To significantly increase the funding available to professional dance companies in Canada already receiving multi-year/annual operation support. To insure the stabilizing of our small and mid-sized companies, the largest percentage increase should go to the smallest organizations.
- To double the maximum annual individual project grant available for new creation from the current \$30,000 to \$60,000.
- To significantly increase the funding available for professional dance companies to tour in Canada to ensure that all Canadians can participate and access the excellence of the Canadian dance sector.
- To increase the funding available for umbrella management/service/touring organizations (i.e., support services) ensuring a stable and sound infrastructure for the support and development of dance.
- To increase funding available for aboriginal dance artists through both individual and production programs.

2. Continue Development

To approve the first objective of consolidation and recapture, it is imperative that at the very minimum, the dance budget is doubled. Please refer to the appended budget scenario. Furthermore, the Regroupement québécois de la danse and the Canadian Dance Assembly look forward to working with Council to implement new initiatives to develop the sector and animate how dance is accessed.

Dance offers the ideal platform for the Canada Council for the Arts to act out its commitment first and foremost to the importance of creative artists in our society. Here is a field of professional arts practice that needs – and deserves – the Canada Council to champion its interests, a field in which the Canada Council plays a primary role in determining the conditions of employment because of its distinct separation from the cultural industries, and a field in which, as much as anywhere else in the artistic life of Canada, Canadian artists demonstrate excellence and leadership on the world stage.

List of Appendixes

Appendix A – Budget Scenario

The appended Budget Scenario is a reflection of the most pressing and immediate financial needs for dance, within the context of the current program structure. This scenario is not meant to illustrate an overall funding goal for dance, but does provide an example of the level of current need of the sector, as well as where immediate priority should be placed at this time. The need remains to develop a long-term financial strategy where the context is not limited to the current program structure, but which reflects the identified goals and vision of the Canadian dance community.

Appendix B – Statistical Highlights

Appendix C – References

**Appendix A
Budget Scenario**

Canada Council Dance Section

*for reference

Program	Value of grants awarded Proposed increases (thousands of \$)	Value of grants awarded Fiscal year 2004-2005 - Actuals (thousands of \$)
Annual Support and Production Project Grants to Aboriginal Peoples	1,080.00	300.00
Creation/Production in Dance	14,580.80	9,481.00
Dance on Screen Production Fund	775.00	359.00
Dance Touring Grants	2,302.00	1,039.20
Grants to Aboriginal Dance Professionals	1,080.00	179.20
Grants to Dance Professionals: Emerging/Mid-Career/Established	3,000.00	438.10
International Co-Production Program for Dance	350.00	105.00
Pilot Program of Presenter Support for Creation-Based Partnerships	400.00	272.45
Production Project Grants in Dance	2,000.00	309.50
Program of Presenter Support: Multi-Year, Annual and Project	340.00	696.00
Support Services to the Dance Millieu	1,950.00	340.00
The Dance Flying Squad I	186.15	975.00
The Dance Flying Squad II	56.00	186.15
Travel Grants to Dance Professionals	75.00	56.00
New Initiatives	5,825.10	77.53
Total	34,000.05	14,814.13

Appendix B Statistical Highlights

- The number of people earning a living in Canada from dance as dancers or dance teachers grew from 400 in 1971 to 6,400 in 2001, while performing dancers (vs. teachers) numbered 2,400 in 2001.
- The number of dancers nearly tripled during the 1970s, then increased by a further 40% in the 1980s, and by a further 70% in the 1990s, making dance the second fastest growing arts occupation in the 1990s. Dance has significantly exceeded the growth of the labour force as a whole over this 30 year period.
- Professional dancers performed in an average of 30 performances per year, and spent at least 12 hours in performance and/or rehearsals (excluding class) in approximately 26 weeks between September 2003 and August 2004. On average, they were paid for 24 of these 26 weeks.
- The number of not-for-profit professional dance companies identified by Statistics Canada has grown from 5 to nearly one hundred from the 1970s to 2000.
- The number of performances presented increased from 569 in 1975 to over 2,200 at the end of the century.
- Dance is the arts occupation whose workers are most likely to cite not getting the training they want (about 40%). For most cost is the largest barrier, and is more important for this group than for other culture occupations.
- Since dance companies are touring only half as much as 20 years ago, and touring costs remain high, the companies are contributing more of their operating budgets to touring.
- Touring abroad represents about one-half of all touring performances by dance companies funded by the Canada Council for the Arts.
- Professional dance companies conduct a higher percentage of their performances on tour (40%) than other performing arts companies because there are often limited opportunities in the home market.
- Over 1 million Canadian adults take dance classes or perform dance in their communities

Appendix C References

The research documents referred to are listed below:

1. *Danse en péril/Dance at Risk*, report by le Regroupement québécois de la danse, March 2001
2. *Facts on Dance: Then and Now – and Now What?*, prepared for the Canada Council for the Arts, T.J. Cheney Research Inc. April 2004
3. *Mapping the Professional Field of Dance in Canada as supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, 1983-2003*, report by the Canada Council Dance Section, fall 2004
4. *A Profile of Professional Dancers in Canada*, survey compiled by Hill Strategies Research Inc. for the Dancer Transition Resource Centre, February 16, 2005
5. *A Synthesis of Recent Research into Dance in Canada*, report prepared for the Canada Council for the Arts, by Roy MacSkimming Consulting. August 2005