

Discussion Paper

**JOINT CDA/RQD PRESENTATION
New Initiatives**

October 2006

Background

Last March, the joint CDA/RQD Committee presented an initial report to Anne Valois, Head of the Dance Section and André Courchesne, Director of the Arts Division. The report was then submitted to the CCA's Board of Directors. In the report, the Committee describes high points in Canadian professional dance as well as its spectacular development over the last thirty years, despite an environment marked by stagnation and decline in public funding for arts and culture. The under funding of dance has become chronic over the years. Consequences include: a sector that is financially and structurally incapable of maintaining the speed of production and dissemination needed to fully develop national and international audiences; build its repertoire with major works; improve the living conditions and conditions of practice of its artists and cultural workers and integrate two or three generations of artists considered to be emerging into the system.

Behind its prestigious companies; its reputation for excellent training, performances, research and creation; and strong audience growth as compared to the other performing arts lies another story: that of a still-young discipline that is already fettered; that of a discipline hobbled because the proper foundations have not been laid.

To substantiate a request for a significant and absolutely vital increase in the funds allocated to dance, the document describes the conditions required to meet the technical and artistic challenges faced in an art form of research and creation where the primary resource, demanding and unique, is the dancing body. These conditions have become constraints and kept Canadian dance from attaining its full potential, all for a lack of means. In summary, professional dance's heaviest burden and most serious problem today is the complete absence of the kind of structure that could bring together and strengthen all the links in the chain: training, research and creation, production, dissemination and cultural mediation.

Consolidate assets and make up for lost time

The request to double the amount currently allocated to dance is based on a budget scenario under which the relevance of current programs would be validated and increases would be determined with an eye to making up for inter-generational, sectoral and regional disparities. In this \$34 million request, which brings dance funding back to 20% of the overall CCA funding budget, a position has been advanced for supporting new initiatives. To our mind, such initiatives cannot be a substitute for the effort and investments required to consolidate existing models and structures. As for objectives (which cannot be attained without a coherent effort at consolidation), we propose injecting energy into and reinforcing initiatives begun over the last few years in our dance committees in collaboration with the Dance Section. These initiatives should respond to very specific discipline-development issues.

Initiatives in step with the future

At the request of the Dance Section and Arts Division, the joint committee is submitting proposals on three initiatives for discussion. The essential goal of these proposals is to get the most out of current actors in Canadian dance (institutions, companies, production collectives, production centres, group management tools, specialized dissemination agents, scholars, writers and consultants) and allow the skills and know-how that have been acquired over the years in all sectors to be more widely shared and circulated.

In the interests of quality, flexibility, openness and continuity, we have proposed three initiatives: **Creative Environments, New Management Models and Dance Literacy.**

These initiatives are intended to stimulate artistic and inter-generational emulation within and among our communities; enhance professional and audience development locally, nationally and internationally through the creation and dissemination of strong pieces; raise the quality of our exchange with the public by providing them access to reference, reading and aesthetic appreciation tools; and reinforce all the links in the chain by experimenting with new organization and management models (for creation, production, promotion, dissemination, market development, career management) that are responsive to today's challenges.

These three initiatives, although presented as new, have been inspired by programs implemented over the last few years by the Dance Section or, more generally, by the Canada Council for the Arts: the Flying Squad, Support Services to the Dance Milieu, Presenter Support for Creation-Based Partnerships and the Audience and Market Development Program. These initiatives are about the future. They have been inspired by the decision taken by the Canada Council for the Arts to take the new appropriations received for the next two years and apply them to consolidation objectives.

Creative Environments Initiative

Definition:

Creative Environments Initiative is a proposal to enhance the ability of artists to unite in the research and development of quality dance across Canada.

There is a great need across this country for artists to have the time, place and support for creative research, questioning their creative processes and interacting with other artists/collaborators/mentors. Creating ease of access of artists between and within communities is essential to this process.

We must be ready to support our artists throughout the learning and mastering of their craft as well as in the creation of pieces for the stage. We have become extremely product oriented without adequately recognizing that great products require important periods of general preparation and research.

The Creative Environments Initiative aims to:

- Create connections between artists locally, regionally and nationally through collaboration, mentorship and creative exchange, as a way of broadening the context in which Canadian artists can work and create dance
- Provide choreographic centres and other venues with the necessary resources to support the exploration, creation and development of choreographic work

To succeed, this initiative will undoubtedly require reinforcing what already exists and developing new measures.

Objectives:

- To promote the sharing of knowledge and experience among peers and across generations, regions and cultures;
- To enable artists to travel outside their city of residence to access opportunities for work and/or professional development;
- To support creative exchange for the purpose of co-creation or co-production regionally and nationally;
- To provide existing choreographic centres and other venues with the means necessary to provide artistic programming including residencies, workshops, labs and forums;
- To provide skill development opportunities for artists at all career stages relating to the creation and interpretation of choreographic work
- To improve the quality of choreographic work being created and presented in Canada and abroad.

Importance to the Form:

By supporting this initiative, we believe that our artists will develop new tools to aid in the creation of excellent work, our communities will be invested with a dynamic dance scene and our country will be recognized for its vision and dynamism.

Impact:

- Artists at all stages in their career:
 - Those developing their choreographic/performance voices by allowing means to exchange and learn with other artists and specialists
 - Artists of all ages wanting to research new creative options and question their creative process through workshops, residencies and forums
 - Artists looking to create in partnership with other artists across Canada
 - Mature artists wanting to share their experience and knowledge with up and coming generations
 - Artists wanting the ability to practice creating/performing outside of a formal performance context
- Communities:
 - Creating dynamic connections with artists across the country
 - Broadening the programming of dance beyond performances
 - Increased quality of dance being presented due to increase opportunities for research and development of pieces

Current programs within the Canada Council that overlap with the Initiative:

Expanding the scope and intent of existing programs could begin the process of developing the creative environments in which artists research and develop quality dance across Canada.

Some examples are as follows:

Support Services to the Dance Milieu and Presenter Support for Creation-Based Partnerships:

These programs could expand to encourage the development of workshops, forums, labs, residencies and artist exchange. These activities should be possible whether driven by a choreographic centre, a company or a group of artists.

Outreach Section and Dance Travel Grants:

The Outreach office and the Dance Section's travel grant program would have the ability to encourage and support travel of artists across the country for research, creation and development projects. Short turn around time for travel-related funds is helpful.

Flying Squad:

To fulfill the Creative Environments Initiative will require investment in the training of effective mentors and other collaborators in the creative process such as artistic counselors and dramaturges. This may be possible through the Flying Squad.

New Management Models Initiative

Definition:

The **New Management Models Initiative** aims to nurture the development of high quality Canadian dance by recognizing that the way arts organizations were structured and managed up until the 1990's should be re-examined to embrace new methods of working. These new models can more appropriately address the lack of financial and human resources that are coupled with an environment that is rapidly changing and unstable. Today's artists also wish to train, work and manage their careers in a way that is conducive to allowing them to work with optimal results. As the existing management models of many dance organizations were the stepping stones in the development of the art form, it is fair to conclude that new, flexible and innovative ways for artists to create will help to produce a new generation of strong and successful dance artists and managers.

Also, the sheer growth of the number of new dance artists entering the field precludes the ability of the funders to fund at the earlier levels of support – in the early 1980's as much as 80% of a dance company's revenues came from the Canada Council, today that percentage of support is below 25%.

The Dance Section of the Canada Council has always been responsive to the changing needs of the vast spectrum of dance entities and organizations. For example, the Flying Squad Programs for Dance, both 1 and 2, have provided dance companies with invaluable support in allowing artists to determine how they would like to create. The dance community now needs the Dance Section to build on that success and create further opportunities for dance artists to succeed.

Objectives:

- To provide an environment where dance artists can continue to work in new formats at their choice and not have to grow into traditional arts organizations with the accompanying infrastructure;
- To support the upsurge in the expansion, range, diversity and productivity of artists working in non-formal and non-institutional formats;
- To create room for flexible management models both in definition and scope as well as criteria and expected outcomes;
- To facilitate the emergence of young arts managers who are entering the field and seeking different ways of working with creative artists; and
- To provide opportunities for ongoing training and development for dance artists during all stages of their careers.

Importance to the Form:

In order for Canadian dance to continue to thrive and grow, changes to how we fund artists and their administrative support need to occur.

- Non-formal or alternative producing entities require better and / or new supporting administrative and management structures.
- The increasing deficit of trained administrators, managers, producers, agents must have training/development/mentoring programs in place to alleviate an impending crisis in the milieu.
- By doing so we will provide the environment that will allow artists to create work that is relevant to how and what they want to produce.

Impact:

- Individual artists: Positively affecting their working environment, both emerging and established, as well as artists working in regions outside the major urban centres.
- Companies, support service organizations: Allowing for greater flexibility with regards to structure.
- Dance presenters: Flexible models will allow for more collaborative relationships between dance artists and presenters, encouraging innovative programming and potentially leading to new models of presentation.

Current programs within the Canada Council that overlap with the Initiative:

There are currently programs at the Canada Council that, with some enhancement could begin to address some of the issues discussed.

Flying Squad: This program has been, and will continue to be an important tool for the development, health and sustainability of all arts entities and the sector. It is the link in the chain that can be used to assist in the development of a pool of effective producers, agents, tour bookers and managers, etc. The exchange of knowledge from the few remaining individuals with these skills must be supported and encouraged through mentoring processes and activities supported by this program.

Outreach Section: This office has in the past assisted in the development of strategies around meeting the needs of outreach and development as it pertains to emerging touring agents.

Dance Literacy Initiative

Definition:

Dance Literacy, for the purposes of our discussion, refers to the level of understanding and appreciation of dance 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 is it 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.

Proposed here is support for the creation of critical and contextual writing for and about dance performances and events. Dance is a non-verbal art form, and consequently, the vast majority of audience members, while they may have a visceral response to a work, do not always feel that they have appropriate and/or adequate language to express their response. Often, they may not feel confident to engage in a meaningful dialogue about the work and their experience with fellow audience members or other potential dance audiences in society.

The visual arts, also generally regarded as a non-verbal art form, strategically addressed this situation in Canada with their audiences in the late 1970's and early 1980s with the development of curation and the introduction of supporting catalogues and materials. It is common practice to attend a visual arts event and not only have the opportunity to experience the artistic offering first hand, but also have access to accompanying support information (i.e. a catalogue containing curatorial statements, artist statements, information providing societal and/or historic context about the work and the artist). It is proposed that dance could benefit from learning from this practice and adopting a similar approach in assisting to give language to audiences to enrich their experience and also their ability to express themselves about that experience.

It should be noted that currently artist chats and panel discussions do contribute to addressing audience's needs for more information and tools. However, what is proposed would be an addition to these current activities.

Objectives:

- To lead to more meaningful engagement between audiences and dance artists;
- To provide broader perspective and information on dance artists and their work;
- To contextualize the work of dance artists in society;
- To provide vehicles for critical discourse;
- To contribute to the plurality of views from various regions of the country relating to dance;
- To increase audience numbers by addressing audience satisfaction;
- To leave a residual or document of a dance event;
- To contribute towards building a legacy for Canadian dance (archiving via the printed document); and
- To support the training and role of qualified dance writers.

Importance to the Form:

It is expected that placing a strategic priority on addressing audiences' challenges in contending with a non-verbal art form by providing them with written (language based) tools, a significant impact will result on their level of engagement and satisfaction. Consequently it is anticipated that dance audiences will increase over time.

Impact:

- Public: The level of engagement and audience satisfaction with dance experiences will be highly impacted by this initiative and it is anticipated this will lead to future audience growth.
- Dance companies: An increase in audience will lead to increased recognition and support for dance companies.
- Individual artists: An increase in audience will lead to increased recognition and support for individual dance artists.
- Presenters: An increase in audience will most definitely have a financial impact on dance presenters, but so too will the level of audience satisfaction, potentially lead to greater dance presenter/audience loyalty.
- Communities developing in the regions (i.e. outside of the traditional dance hubs of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver) : Dance faces some of its greatest challenges in the smaller dance centres, where community and audience support may be relatively limited given the smaller local community of artists and the limited access to touring dance work. It is believed that literacy tools will have a favorable impact on dance appreciation in these communities.

Current programs within the Canada Council that overlap with the Initiative:

Currently, projects for initiatives have been accepted in the Dance Section's Support Services program. However, this is a competitive program with diverse initiative and literacy applications as proposed here having historically received limited success.

Some dance publications (i.e. Dance Currents) have been successful at receiving funds from the Writing and Publishing Section of The Canada Council. However, this support is not targeted with the same intent as what is proposed here. However, an increase in the number of dance publications (from different regions of the country) would most definitely contribute to and support dance literacy.

It is interesting to examine the programs in the Visual Arts Section at The Canada Council for the Arts, specifically the Grants to Professional Independent Critics and Curators and Project Assistance to Visual Arts and Fine Craft Organizations programs, specifically as they relate to audience development activities and publication projects. It is believed that these programs may serve as valuable models for consideration.