

A CASE OF DANCE

*Dance Advocacy Committee
Vancouver, BC*

Dance is one of Canada's fastest-growing artforms. It is also one of our favourite pastimes.

Social dance in nightclubs ... the formal delicacy of classical ballet ... the bubbling vitality of hip-hop or the rat-a-tat velocity of tap ... the thoughtful intricacies of modern dance or the lithe dexterity of jazz ...

Whatever our preference in movement, dance has the capacity to thrill and delight us.

The bedrock of all that exuberant activity and pleasure is the professional dance community.

The professional dance community of British Columbia is widely recognized in Canada and around the world. It is praised and respected for the quality of its work, for its creative innovation, for its leadership and professional training, and for its wide-ranging collaborative partnerships.

But its current levels of achievement are not sustainable without a substantial increase in support on all fronts. That means support for creation, training, presentation, touring and not least for physical space.

In this brief document, the dance professionals of British Columbia summarize the real and potential benefits of dance both for the individual and for society in general. And we explain why we believe that the support that is given to dance should be raised to a level that makes it possible to bring those benefits to everyone.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

1. Dance celebrates our physical being. We all have an instinctive desire to move. When we watch dance we see movement that is made by bodies like our own. It engenders a profound sense of confidence and joy. We also, quite naturally and instinctively, find moving bodies good to look at.

2. Dance satisfies a deep human need to communicate. It has been a means of communication since the start of human history. It communicates in the most primal and basic of ways – through our bodies, without words. Africa's Bantu tribesmen used to greet strangers with the words: "What do you dance?"

3. Dancing is good for you. Regular dancing helps cut the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and cancer. It helps avoid weight gain and improves posture. It encourages coordination, balance and muscle strength. It reduces tension and stress, improves circulation and reduces the risk of late-life scourges like Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

4. Dancing is inspirational. The stimulus that we get from the images and ideas that dancers put in front of us can have a profound effect on our lives. Emotionally, it's an outlet for powerful feelings. Spiritually, it's a way to find fulfilment and serenity. Dance helps us dream the future. It speaks the language of the human heart.

Dance brings us closer to each other – literally and metaphorically. Whether it's Swan Lake or salsa, the heart of dancing lies in partnerships and group collaboration. It needs no words. So it cuts across barriers of language, culture and race and lets us explore and share the values and beliefs of our neighbours.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR US ALL?

1. Dance is a significant contributor to the magic economic multiplier of public investment in the arts. Canada's governments invest about \$7.4 billion a year in cultural activities. That investment generates \$43.2 billion for the Canadian economy. In other words, every dollar invested by the taxpayer generates \$5 in economic benefits. Professional dance is a significant contributor to that economic multiplier.

2. Our dance professionals are an integral part of the "creative class." Through their innovative creations, and their collaborations with other artists and with scientific researchers, they help generate a climate of imagination, generosity and acceptance. The fresh and provocative vitality of their work invites the bright and curious minds that will help keep our province prosperous.

3. Dance contributes to better learning in our young people. We all know how naturally children dance. But studies show that an education that includes dance fosters originality and imaginative problem-solving. Dance

encourages both teamwork and self-confidence - essential qualities in the imagination-based society of the 21st century.

4. Dance plays a role in community development. Modern society is increasingly diverse. Dance reinforces partnerships that help us build more collaborative and harmonious communities.

5. Our dancers showcase British Columbia's creativity and demographic variety to the world. If a region or country wishes to thrive in the global economy, it must brand itself as distinctive, imaginative and unique. Our dancers are the visible and colourful creative face of the West Coast. They are ambassadors in motion.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The successes and achievements of the professional dance community in British Columbia are a source of pride for all British Columbians. The Scotiabank Dance Centre, designed by the renowned Arthur Erickson, is unique in Canada. It is the envy of other dance communities in cities throughout North America. Many artists in other disciplines lack a focal point of this kind for collaboration and partnership.

Our professional dance community is richly diverse. Audiences can enjoy everything from nationally-ranked modern ballet to numerous highly regarded small modern dance companies. Our dance community reflects the exciting demographic mix of Canada's Pacific Rim metropolis. And across the board, its work is marked by a high degree of quality and innovation.

Unfortunately, the playing-field is at a decided tilt.

Unlike publishing, music or film, dance is not considered a "cultural industry." So it is often forced to take a back seat when it comes to funding. Additionally, dance, unlike publishing, music or film, has to physically tour to survive. That means it incurs significant, sometimes prohibitive costs.

Current successes are frankly not sustainable.

We all want dance to continue to deliver the many benefits it currently provides. We all want it to maintain its competitive edge in the national and international arenas.

But the realities of professional dance – preparation, creation, presentation, distribution, accommodation – make it vital that conditions improve.

- **Average income for dance workers of all kinds is traditionally near poverty levels. On average, dancers earn approximately \$18,000 from their work in dance.**

- Places in which to train and to make and present new work are expensive and hard to find.
- The threat of career-ending injury is ever-present.
- Working in communities and building cultural partnerships consumes both time and labour.
- Making our professional dance product accessible to all British Columbians is a constant challenge.
- And as is the case with research in any field, the all-important collaborative partnerships that deliver genuine innovation can only function with consistent and enlightened support.

Recent government studies have shown that the community needs help to improve marketing and management. It needs more and better facilities for presentation, creation and rehearsal. It needs more generous funding for creation by our gifted dance makers. It needs a better touring infrastructure to take work to audiences in all parts of the province. It needs more support for access to the international dance world through touring and cultural exchange.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

We want everyone to experience the true benefits that we have been describing. But a significant upgrade in support for our professional dance community is necessary.

Financial support, of course.

But also moral support - through widespread public and political recognition that dance is an integral part of the fabric of a civilized and humane society.

A society where we recognize that creative activity, collaboration and partnerships contribute to the greater social good.

A society in which we celebrate the many ways in which our dance performers and creators help support British Columbia's proud claim to be "the best place on earth."

Tell your friends. Tell your MLA. Tell your MP. Tell the Premier. Share the wealth of dance with everyone you know. Help make the dance arts grow.

This document was created by the Dance Advocacy Committee, a network of artists and organizations representing the Vancouver dance community in province-wide advocacy and lobbying efforts for the arts.

For more information visit www.thedancecentre.ca