

AFTER SUPERSTORM SANDY: NYC DANCE RESPONDS (HUFFINGTON POST)

Wednesday, November 6, 2013

After Superstorm Sandy: NYC Dance Responds (Huffington Post)

By Lane Harwell

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Of the videos released so far as part of [NEW YORKERS FOR DANCE](#) -- a new visibility campaign spotlighting why dance matters to our city -- there is one I find particularly compelling: this statement from Luanne Sorrentino of Staten Island's St. George Theatre and Mrs. Rosemary's Dance Studio.

Luanne's story is one of 15 families wiped out by superstorm Sandy and of the art form helping to bring together her community in Staten Island to lift these families back up -- of what she calls "the healing nature and the beauty of what dance can do." She is one of many heroes in dance we should celebrate this week, the first anniversary of Sandy's arrival. We should also use the occasion to share lessons learned and keep on advancing the readiness of our artists and organizations to respond to future disasters, lift spirits, and reinvigorate neighborhoods.

This week last year, the service organization I run, [Dance/NYC](#), assumed the role of an arts responder, collecting early testimony that made the case for an NYC Dance Response Fund, established by the [Mertz Gilmore Foundation](#). The Fund delivered \$200,000 to 51 dance nonprofits and fiscally sponsored artists of all shapes and sizes hard hit by the storm, many with shoestring budgets. The impact was both field- and citywide (read more in [The New York Times](#)).

Now, a year later, we have a greater sense of these losses as well as the capacity for resilience in dance. Consider these new findings, released at a [Town Hall at the Martha Graham Center for Contemporary Dance](#) on Tuesday, October 29, 2013 (you may remember, famously, that priceless sets designed by Isamu Noguchi for Martha Graham and her company were submerged in the storm):

- dance groups report total losses of \$5.7 million and a median loss of just over \$9,000;
- 55 percent of losses have been recovered on average;
- income was the primary area of loss (actual income, 80 percent of groups; projected income, 71 percent; personnel costs, 53 percent; space rental, 47 percent; property damage, 22 percent and storage and moving expenses, 18 percent);
- 92 percent of groups perceive a need for future emergency funding, and many identify additional support needs for future disasters, from volunteers and emergency space to counseling services;
- 65 percent of groups cite financial losses as a challenge to further programming.

Of the opportunities that arose from Sandy, groups are also citing advances in their management and operations to prepare for and respond to future disasters, including new emergency plans, technology acquisitions and cash reserves. There are many stories, like Luanne's, of deepened community engagement, from the delivery of free tickets to Sandy victims and volunteerism efforts to new production partnerships. Some even report creative gains, from more time to rehearse to new work inspired by the superstorm.

A key opportunity that arose for those of us who advocate for the arts and make the case for policy and investment is, as Luanne puts it, evidence of the "healing nature" of dance; the people of New York needed dance and culture to recover. For dance and culture to do this critical work, however, they need the support of all New Yorkers.

One year later, Sandy is not over. Rather, rebuilding a stronger and more resilient city should and will be at the top of the list for the new administration and city council joining us in January. We, in dance and in our allied disciplines, may consider this anniversary as a new beginning, and continue to learn lessons for the future.

During Sandy, I was one of many New Yorkers who lost power and water in my (downtown Manhattan) home and office for several days, experienced severe hiccups in travel, felt the cold and was bewildered by a streetscape divided by dark and light, wet and dry. I was lucky, at the edge of an evacuation zone and safe. I was all the more lucky to have been able to focus on service and respond with dance.

Please note: This article first appeared on Lane Harwell's Huffington Post Blog on November 6, 2013.
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