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[JOURNAL] Profile: Dance/NYC Director Lane Harwell

By nas2126

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Chat-back with Lane Harwell



Dance/NYC announced in September 2010 that it had chosen a new director to serve as the leader of New York's branch of the national service organization for the professional dance field. Lane Harwell was selected to succeed Michelle Burkhart, who had effectively served the dance community in the same role since 2008. Prior to joining Dance/NYC, Lane was the director of development at New York's arts-wide advocacy group, the Alliance for the Arts. His lifelong history in the arts also includes training at the School of American Ballet, a performance career with American Ballet Theatre Studio Company, and management experience in diverse theater and service contexts. Lane attended the Professional Children's School while performing with ABT. He holds a BA in Philosophy from Princeton University and an MA in Performance Studies from the University of California at Berkeley. He is currently pursuing an MBA at Columbia Business School, focusing on the applicability of for-profit management approaches to the nonprofit sector.

Junior Committee: How has your diverse background (dance performance, academia, business management) shaped your perspective on the dance world today?

Lane Harwell: My background has given me a broad perspective on the dance world. I see the world as a classroom, a community, an economic engine and a way of life.

But what they say is true: once a dancer, always a dancer. It's in the bones.

JC: As a native New Yorker, what is your opinion on the relationship of Dance/NYC and non-profit arts organizations in general to the New York dance and arts communities?

LH: My own—and Dance/NYC's philosophy—is that the city's nonprofit arts organizations are stronger when working together than when working apart. Dance/NYC is anti-silo and anti-redundancy. It is pro shared innovation, information and intellectual capital. And as the spokesperson for NYC dance, Dance/NYC is more than a local leader; it is a leader in national and international conversations about dance.

JC: What has your personal experience been like transitioning from dance training and performance to higher education and arts administration?

LH: Ah, my wild adventure: steps from front to backstage. Some steps have been unplanned (at first, my development job at the Alliance for the Arts), some have been strategic (the Columbia MBA), but all have led me where I want to be and where I work best: making dance happen and making dance strong.

JC: In an ideal world, what would you like to see Dance/NYC accomplish in the next year? 5 years? 10 years?

LH: Dance/NYC is the only organization that speaks on behalf of the City's entire dance community—its artists, managers and audiences. My goal for the year and years ahead is to give Dance/NYC a louder voice and a wider reach—across the public, corporate and social sectors. The organization is well-positioned to expand its leadership advocacy, research and dance service technology, while remaining flexible and responsive to the needs of the community as they arise.

JC: What are the biggest challenges you see for Dance/NYC and the New York dance community at large?

LH: Where there is challenge, I see opportunity. Changing funding sources, shifting audience demographics, new media and new spaces are all opportunities to grow NYC dance. The role of Dance/NYC is to help dance makers innovate and collaborate on programs, marketing and management, and to advocate—loudly—on their behalf.

JC: How did you first become involved with Dance/NYC, and what attracted you to the director position?

LH: I became involved with Dance/NYC through its parent, Dance/USA, and Dance/USA's Emerging Leaders Task Force. My lifelong passion for NYC dance and desire to shape its future drew me to the directorship when the opportunity came up this summer.

JC: What advice do you have for young dancers considering a transition to career in arts administration or management?

LH: Find mentors. Build a network. Train hard. Create a project that fuels your passion. Do it.

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