

DANCE/NYC COMMUNITY CONVERSATION # 4: GENERAL FIELD CONVENING 1 OF 2

4:30 -6:30 PM

Thursday June 16, 2011

Mertz Gilmore Foundation, New York

Attendees:

Brittany	Beyer	Hypatia Artist Services
Lily	Binns	Pilobolus Dance Company
Bryan	Berkopec	Arete Corporate Advisory, LLC
Tom	Borek	Dance Critics' Association
Roland	Gebhart	Dance/NYC Advisory Committee Member; Owner, Roland Gebhart Designs
Ladan	Hamidi-Toosi	New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Kevin	Irving	Teacher, Ballet Master, Associate of Nacho Duato, Morphoses
Jeff	Kazin	The Bang Group
Lourdes	Lopez	Morphoses
JoAnna	Mendl Shaw	The Equus Projects/Dancing with Horses; The Juilliard School
Kit	Pang	Dancer, Choreographer, Teacher
Alexandra	Rosenberg	The Chocolate Factory
Lucy	Sexton	The Bessies, Producer
Priya	Sircar	Columbia University Teachers' College
Sydney	Skybetter	Skybetter & Associates, Design Brooklyn, Dance/USA board member
Imogen	Smith	Dance Heritage Coalition
Toni	Taylor	Pi Dance Theatre
Nicole	Vandestienne	TAKE Dance
Pittman	Ware	The Joyce Theater (DANY Studios)

Regrets:

Lydia	Bell	Danspace Project
Yvonne	Chow	The Hip Hop Dance Conservatory
Yasmine	Fequiere	The Hip Hop Dance Conservatory
Nathaniel	Haynesworth	Forces of Nature Dance Theater
Elizabeth	Johanningmeier	Morphoses
Matthew	Keefe	American Repertory Ballet, Dance/USA Board, Dance/USA Taskforce on Dancer Health
LA	Kilpatrick	Freelance Artist--Dancer, Work Study at Mark Morris Dance Group
Richard	McFadden	
Sydney	Mosley	Dancer, Choreographer, Teacher - Brooklyn Ballet
Robin	Staff	DanceNOW Festival
Kay	Takeda	Lower Manhattan Cultural Council
Toni	Taylor	Pi Dance Theatre
Marya	Wethers	Dance Theater Workshop

How many of you have an existing personal or organizational relationship with Dance/USA?

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What distinguishes the New York City dance community from the field elsewhere in the country?

- New York City has the largest dance population in the world and it's been often considered a dance capital of the world—and so we have a role and a working situation here that's very important internationally and far different compared to other cities.
- I think it really stems from the last 50 years of dance history, when some of the major choreographic talents from many streams of dance came together in this city and created what we think of as the "New York City dance scene"—I'm thinking of the New York City Ballet, Balanchine, American Ballet Theatre, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham: they all had tentacles and offshoots that fed the scene here until the 1990's. It was all humming along quite nicely [until then]. But Balanchine died in 1983, and since then, I'd say there's been an identity crisis at New York City Ballet; the American Ballet Theatre has also struggled through

financial crises several times; Martha Graham died in 1989, and her company has obviously also gone through change; the top tier companies have all suffered some serious setbacks over the last twenty years, and so the scene below them has suffered, too. When the top tier was artistically and financially healthy, I think it fed a very strong dance world beneath them. Now, it's very much more difficult for all of us. That's why Dance/NYC is important, to help us unify and make a strong case for our art and for the money to support it.

- Having taught conservatory, I've always seen that New York City is the end destination for many young dancers. They'll come to New York, and they're not going to get into the big working companies, but they want to perform anyway, and they've been amazing about creating little companies and opportunities and finding small venues for themselves. The grassroots dance scene here is really vibrant. A lot of my students have stayed here and are making it work for themselves. They are very entrepreneurial, but they need information and resources, and that's where Dance/NYC can help. It's fascinating to watch this whole other culture [of young entrepreneurialism] growing up: it has an interesting vitality for the rest of us [older people].
- Yes, I think Dance/NYC really serves that younger population, and there's such a density of dancers from the big institutions and a groundswell of younger people and emerging artists. I'm not sure one national service organization can accommodate all the population that's here [in our city]—let alone nationally. That's why we need our own organization.
- There are actually a lot of opportunities, precisely because there are so many of us.
- The national scope of Dance/USA is a huge constituency, and so for just a single person—a single choreographer like me—trying to get on their national radar is virtually impossible, whereas Dance/NYC is a local organization that offers a local pathway to get some attention for me and my work. Also, I feel like Dance/NYC is more focused on individuals rather than on companies.
- The density and breadth of what's on offer here is really unmatched in any other city in the world. New York is a place where things happen: we make things and we show them. It's very much an active city. And I think we need an entity that can be a unifying rubric to present and market what we do here to the rest of the world. You have to be [located] here to do that.

How could we benefit most from having a representative organization like Dance/NYC? What are some ways our field could strengthen its voice and its effectiveness?

- I think our field could be stronger if it became part of the greater arts community and coordinated more with the other cultural disciplines. There's so much happening already in different areas that greater unity across disciplines would help us.
- You're right: the hardest thing about dance is that it becomes insular in its own discipline. If we were to reach out, I think of organizations like Broadway Cares and The Actors' Fund right away.
- I think the field of dance itself needs help in marketing itself to a general audience. The service organizations would provide a huge help if they taught us all how to market our work to a general audience beyond our friends, family and supporters. Also, service organizations could fill the gap where newspapers and press have declined with a concerted press campaign to publicize dance in general.
- I think there's a serious professional development need for the New York City dance community. For a start, grappling with the unique economics of New York City is a tough challenge. We have to deal with things like hybrid business modeling, alternative financing, multiple financing—these are things that are well outside the national status quo; things that are cutting edge, and Dance/NYC could be a resource for that and strengthen the whole field. A national organization can't do that.
- As someone who is new to dance and who is a business person, I get the impression that there's this overarching feeling of struggling and there's never comfort that we're going to be able to pay the bills or do things with a level of peace. So an advocacy organization like Dance/NYC can help you think more broadly about how to run a company; think of new business models, create a buzz about the field and its creativity. I can see Dance/NYC playing a role like The Foundation Center to inform, educate, and push forward the field.

How do we, as people committed to the dance field, make some of the changes you are describing?

- The activist role needs to be taken on, of counteracting this notion that the arts are something minor or dismissible. We as artists do not make proper propaganda for ourselves—our dancers have to get out of the *mode* of sweating, and talk about the *product* of the sweating!
- Dance/NYC should definitely play that advocacy role: it offers anonymity and some "cover" to the community. It can speak for us, because if one of us tries to become an activist ourselves, we run the risk of being blacklisted, or becoming *persona non*

grata. We need Dance/NYC as a non-partisan organization that can advocate much more strongly for us than we can as individuals.

- Yes, I think of Dance/NYC as the “Switzerland” of the dance community! That said, being non-partisan doesn’t mean you can’t be radical, or opinionated, or advocate radically for all your constituents.
- In this room, every single one of us has a different passion, a different problem. As an organization, how does Dance/NYC come up with a solution that informs *my* problem, *my* issue, *my* passion? I don’t know how you do that—but good luck, Lane!
- I see Dance/NYC with two roles: a very low one, which is incredibly variegated, serving a very diverse community, and the high one, being the local, statewide and national advocacy part. Speaking just for myself here, it’s our job *not* to be business people—but to be creative and insular, to be engaged at the high level in creative dialog. What Dance/NYC can do, then, is manage the structure that creates the opportunities. It can make sure that there’s a place at the table for dance at NYSCA, the NEA, Creative Capital—I could name many more—and with the local and national press, as well. [Dance/NYC should] be the beacon for New York dance.
- Yes, I absolutely agree with that. The more places at the table that Dance/NYC can get us, the better. That’s ideal, and exactly what needs to happen. If Dance/NYC does that, and the money flows as a result of that advocacy, and dance is taken more seriously as a field, then that’s a very good cycle for everyone.
- At the same time, we can’t just leave it up to Dance/NYC. It’s a very small step from being demonstrative on stage, and provocative with your body, to being a political activist and an advocate for dance. There are many of us who can play that dual role, and artists should be political.

Can you give me some examples of how Dance/NYC serves you and the community in New York right now?

- I use their services. I like that it partners with other service organizations to present services to artists at all levels of a career.
- I’m with another service organization and we’re all [of us] interested in the central question: “How can we help the dance community?” But we are based in Washington DC, so Dance/NYC is a great channel and bridge to our colleagues in New York.
- I found Dance/NYC via its website. As a dancer trying to make it out there, I’m looking to make connections, to find resources about what’s out there for dancers, and to learn how I can use them.
- We’ve used Dance/USA as a source of data on national industry standards about our management work, and if it could be more specific and more comprehensive about the field specifics in New York City, that would help us a lot. I’ve gone to the Dance/USA research department for questions about employee benefits, pay scales, and budgeting issues, and for national benchmarking about how to take care of our people and how to be equitable in the field.
- I’ve used the Dance/NYC website to learn about the dance community and about the issues that everyone’s concerned with, and I went to the Mid-Winter Symposium, which was excellent.
- I use the Dance/NYC website and I believe that they are most comprehensive industry listings anywhere.
- In the past, I remember seeking help from Dance/NYC and it was very difficult to get any. I’m back here today for the first time since that really bad experience because Lane asked me to give it another try.
- My organization works hand-in-hand with Dance/NYC, so I know all about it. On a personal level, I like to receive the electronic listings every week, because they give me a real sense of the city I’m living in.
- The Dance/NYC website is an invaluable resource for getting and sharing information.
- I’ve used the website to promote my auditions and performances, as a research tool, and as a resource about the dance scene here in my talks with venues in Europe.
- I agree that the website is helpful; the resources are available and readily centralized. Lacey Althouse is helpful, smart, and knowledgeable. I feel that she cares about me, my company, and our industry. She came and did a professional development session for us once, and it was excellent. I don’t know how else you would get that kind of access without Dance/NYC [existing]. Now we just need it to be bigger, and more robust, because we’re a huge community to serve!
- Dance/USA and Dance/NYC have been incredible for me in a career development sense. I have personally benefited from the open door policy of its managers, and Dance/USA’s national data was the basis of my graduate school entrance essay.
- I value Dance/NYC for the rehearsal space listings and the sense of community around it. Dance/NYC provides an opportunity, outside of sitting in a theatre together, to meet colleagues in the field and beyond.
- I use the website for information.

- I get the emails and see the listings. I remember using the job listings in the past, and the calendar. There used to be another section of practical “How-To’s,” which was also helpful.

Which other service organizations impact your day-to-day work?

- Movement Research, for their discussions, their free showings, and their festivals and social events
- The Field
- The American Institute of Architects
- The Field and Fractured Atlas
- Dance Theatre Workshop and The Field – for the practical things like sample production schedules, press listings, etc.
- The Foundation Center is a great source of free classes, and for research and philanthropy
- The Foundation for Contemporary Arts’ Emergency Grant program
- Pentacle
- Exploring the Metropolis

Apart from money and space—and with only two staff members—where should Dance/NYC focus its energies in order to strengthen the field and its voice?

- An advocacy role with foundations, approaching them for getting services pooled together: spaces, fellowships, and other things we need.
- There needs to be a role of protection—to protect our creative bubble—and then to connect us to other resources that are already out there through the Dance/NYC newsletter, the Mid-Winter Symposium, and other mechanisms.
- Personally, I’m intrigued by the notion of artists as entrepreneurs, because if a stable enough entrepreneurial bubble can be created, then we can protect ourselves [financially]. I think Dance/NYC focus on encouraging entrepreneurialism makes sense.
- I like the idea that Dance/NYC would always be present in places where funding decisions are made. Also, there is potential for Dance/NYC to create a program that matches its constituents with public schools: Dance/NYC could be a matchmaker for those of us who want to work in schools and the places with available opportunity.
- We’re talking about transferable skills and dancers have those skills, even if you are trained to be a dancer and performer. Ailey and Juilliard have amazing outreach programs and some of the most gratifying work the graduates do is in these outreach programs. Is there a way of Dance/NYC having visibility at the institutions where I teach? So that my seniors know about it, and understand that part of their graduating into the community is to learn how to advocate for that community? Also, outreach programs: can dancers go out into the community and have that opportunity to use their non-dance skills? Can Dance/NYC be a matchmaker and a creator of bridges to other worlds?
- It would be helpful if Dance/NYC could create a public visibility campaign that markets dance in general to New Yorkers.
- We may be the dance capital of the world, and have this huge population—but anyone outside of our field has never heard of us! Education and visibility are hugely important. There are more publicly funded performing art schools now than ever before—but what do all those kids do after graduating? I feel that Dance/NYC could sit in that space, and be a focus of information and community for that group. Also, Dance/NYC can help us to sell New York City as the dance capital of the world, in the same way that they say: “Come to New York, go see Broadway... go see DANCE!”
- Let’s look at the places where professional development meets pedagogy: Dance/NYC is positioned to sit at the intersections where multipliers are available: on the internet and in the conservatory departments which dump thousands of dance kids into New York City every year. Dance/NYC can promote internet awareness and entrepreneurship, and then get to the professors in the schools at a faculty level, so as to trickle down to the students who come to New York City to do this work. The “Should I be a 501(c)(3)? Yes or No?” workshop should be taught in every dance conservatory!
- Yes, and advocacy has to be related to education, because the level of dance literacy is so low among the general population and it prevents people from seeing what it is important and what should be funded. We need to educate consumers through teaching dance history: what has come before, and what is happening now, and how it all connects together. Dance/NYC can connect people to places online to see, learn about, and focus on dance.
- I also think we should broaden our take on what dance is. Compare the dance field to the architecture field: how many architecture prizes there are, and how recognized star architects are. They consulted choreographers when designing the JetBlue Terminal at JFK, and there is far more to dance than just the creation of some entertainment.

- Then there is the question of how can we, the constituency, help Dance/NYC, with a staff of two, to implement these ideas? I think that volunteer committees and councils would work.
- Dance/NYC got me involved for the first time in the arts political action network. We can all use the internet and email, and we should do it for dance. Dance/NYC could mobilize us without too much staff time.
- They often say in business: “Artists needs to become more like business people,” but I think that the opposite is true. Businesses spend a lot of money trying to create things that are new and innovative, yet everyone can identify with physical movement. There’s an opportunity to partner with businesses to help them solve some of their management and organizational problems. For instance, Intel just spent over \$30M on “The Creators’ Project,” working with dance and music and technology. There are new paradigms that business people are trying to capitalize on, and particularly in a city like New York, Dance/NYC could play a brokering role in that.

What organizations/entities should Dance/NYC be partnering with to enhance its reach and effectiveness?

- All of the Borough Arts Councils, which have professional development workshops that your members might like to know about.
- Curriculum developers at the high school and college levels, like La Guardia High School for the Performing Arts and SUNY Purchase.
- Grassroots arts advocacy organizations that are focused on getting children and families involved in the arts.
- Dance advocates aren’t only people who are either professional dancers, or who stepped back from that career. Focus on getting to students before they get into the performing arts high schools, and tell them that there are so many options after they leave.
- Consider putting the Dance/NYC messages into public libraries, which are places that children and families go.
- Be seen and heard with other trade organizations and business organizations—and the American Association of Museums. Dance/NYC needs to reach beyond just being dance.
- Also, specifically with relation to New York City funding public hearings, “arts” and “libraries” are lumped together, so make sure that you are connected with library associations as well as A.R.T./NY and the New York City Arts Coalition for these sessions.
- I would add Opera America and Theatre Communications Group: the national service organizations that are located here.

Other services organizations that you have mentioned,—like Fractured Atlas, the Actors’ Fund and A.R.T./NY—charge an annual membership fee. What if Dance/NYC did the same? What benefits would make it worthwhile for you to join?

- Please, no!
- I think that there are a lot of organizations like New York Foundation for the Arts, Fractured Atlas and The Field where you can join financially to access the additional benefits. But I don’t think we need another one.
- I’m pretty sure that Dance/USA membership gets you a membership to Fractured Atlas already. There are a lot of exchanges that are already happening, and so if there are services left that are truly unique, I can’t think of any.
- What we have talked about today is [seeing] Dance/NYC [as] an entirely different thing [to a personal membership organization] and I would love to see us all stay focused on [that model and] those issues that we have discussed. However, if a populist membership puts you in a position to know about things, so you’re on the inside information track, and the resources are then available, and there’s a level of “being a part of it,” then I would become a member.

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