

DANCE/NYC COMMUNITY CONVERSATION # 5: GENERAL FIELD CONVENING 2 OF 2

4:30 -6:30 PM

Thursday June 23, 2011

Mertz Gilmore Foundation, New York

Attendees:

| | | |
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| Victoria | Bailey | The Theater Development Fund |
| Renata | Celichowska | 92nd Street Y - Harkness Dance Center |
| Alberto | Dennis | Choreographer, Dancer, Dance/NYC Advisory Committee member |
| Cathy | Eilers | The Joyce SoHo |
| Erica | Frankel | Dance/NYC Junior Committee member |
| Katie | Friis | The Juilliard School and former partner with Dance/NYC in <i>Dancing Through College and Beyond</i> |
| Tamara | Greenfield | Fourth Arts Block |
| Jan | Hanvik | CSV (Clemente Soto Velez) Cultural & Educational Center |
| Amy | Harrison | RIOULT |
| Paunika | Jones | Freelance dancer, former Dance Theatre of Harlem principal artist |
| Cheryl | Katz | Moving Portraits, Inc. |
| D.J. | McDonald | Dance Parade organizer and cultural writer and editor for <i>City of Glass Arts and Culture</i> blog |
| JoAnna | Mendl Shaw | The Equus Projects |
| Lori | Ortiz | Dance writer and author, <i>Reading Dance.com</i> |
| Gabriela | Poler-Buzali | Jose Limon Dance Foundation |
| Michelle | Preston | The School of American Ballet, formerly Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company |
| Melissa | Sandor | Freelance fundraising consultant |
| Phoebe | Stern | Fourth Arts Block |
| Eva | Yaa Asantewaa | Dance writer and author, <i>InfiniteBody</i> blog |

Regrets:

| | | |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Yvonne | Chow | The Hip-Hop Dance Conservatory |
| Yasmine | Fequiere | The Hip Hop Dance Conservatory |
| Anabella | Lenzu | Annabella Lenzu Dance Drama |
| Nicole | Macotsis | Alwan for the Arts |
| Tasha | Norman | National Dance Week-NYC |
| Gina | Pilamunga | marymutliserivce |
| Carole Aziza | Reid | Def Dance Jam Workshop |

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

4

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

- Its massive size! There's no other population like this one in the USA. You have to learn to let go of not seeing everything.
- There are so many needs, and so much desire for the community to connect with one another that I think Dance/NYC serves a critical role and will continue to do so.
- Just the sheer volume and the insanity of living here: the cost of living, and so on. To be here, and do what we do is pretty astounding.
- There's also more diversity in training, style, and across the board in New York City. There's a multiplicity of everything, here.
- The sheer number of emerging artists coming here to create work and make it in the city. They need much more support from an entity like Dance/NYC than the larger, established organizations.
- Here, dancers can think about being choreographers, and have another life afterwards, as well.
- In New York, there's also tremendous competition and pressure to always be at the top of your game. That practical and psychic pressure may not be the same in other geographical areas.
- There's a greater potential for audiences here, because there are just more people, period.

- I think the dance community here—even as large as it is—is undervalued, and we need Dance/NYC as the community’s voice among the other arts genres in competitive matters like city funding and so on. That we are there [at the table] to compete is important. There are so many other choices that funders—and audiences, for that matter—can make.
- Our city is also distinguished by the depth of the bench in terms of leadership. There are more leaders and emerging leaders in the dance community in New York than in any other city in the world!
- New York also has cultural and racial diversity that you don’t see in other cities—at least not to this degree. And cultural diversity and cultural heritage have direct associations to dance, of course.
- In New York, there are jobs and opportunities for those of us who are not trained dancers, but who want to work in the dance field.
- I think the importance of Dance/NYC is that other organizations [nationally] are going to be looking to us [here] to set the template. In New York, we inevitably encounter the ultimate problems a little sooner. That’s the importance of this community being as vibrant as it can be, because it is a role model for others in the future.
- 30 years ago, there were all these little efforts to be the “national voice for dance,” and the formation of Dance/USA represented the first time our community took a larger national position that was so needed in our field.
- New York City also has a huge cultural legacy of dance from all the individual artists who’ve cut their teeth over the years. New and emerging dance artists needed to find their place in that historical mix.
- Despite the fact that there’s no space, there’s competition, and the spaces are smaller, New York still creates a different atmosphere for dancers and a more stressful one, compared to, say, Minneapolis.
- I think of Dance/USA as being much more about helping established national companies on a broad level. What’s so great about Dance/NYC is that it’s so specialized to this geographic area, and it focuses on individuals. There are so many independent artists and dance makers and managers that Dance/NYC can help to grow as human beings, as individuals, and help to grow their individual skills so that they can contribute to the field in their own way.
- New York is different because it’s an international gateway to dance. All that I’ve been able to see [in dance] is because I’ve lived *here*. I would never have had access to that [range of international programming] in another city. It’s wonderful!

How can we benefit as a community by having a Dance/NYC here? What do we need Dance/NYC to be doing for it?

- Are you aware that the Manhattan Borough President has left the performing arts out of his annual *State of the Borough* address for the past two years running/ And at one City Council hearing, there were only three arts organizations making noise: one was my organization, and one was Lane Harwell on behalf of Dance/NYC. For the *entire* arts scene in the City! And I say, if we’re not making noise, we are left out!
- Yes, it is Dance/NYC as our voice and our advocate; the rest of us stand behind Dance/NYC [as it fights for] for more money for everyone, and more access, and more “everything” for dance. Dance/NYC provides the channel for us to get into the cultural minds of the community.
- Political advocacy was my first exposure to Dance/USA, too. I met a former director on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. I was amazed at the time that there were so few people there for arts advocacy, because “Arts Day on Capitol Hill” is a huge national program, and on that day, you really have to be there in person to be heard. Dance/NYC should be similarly strong, educating the artists’ community about advocacy and how to do it, how to be heard. We can’t assume that conservatory graduates will know this stuff. All of us have to “learn how to be counted.” And someone has to teach us.
- Yes, I think that Dance/NYC and Dance/USA lobbying has been the channel to resources and funding and opportunities for people in the dance world.

What are some ways our field could strengthen its voice and its effectiveness?

- Find a way to pry us out of our seats and call us to action! Advocacy always falls to the bottom of the list. We’re all so strapped for time, there’s no time to spend half a day to wait on line to speak. If we could just see past that, to its value, and really be effective together, we could really make the case for dance.
- Yes, all of us are educators and advocates and there is a permeable wall between those two areas.

- I think that there's the opportunity for Dance/NYC to be a conduit. Service organizations have to figure out how to partner and talk to each other and how to do things that we practitioners don't have time to do. For instance, I know when to call A.R.T./NY for help. There's some stuff that can be done more effectively the more we work together and only deploy the membership [on political activity] when we really need them.
- I think you're getting at something important: leverage is a big term, and I think the main thing that Dance/NYC could do is help leverage the three main platforms we have in New York: drama, media, and fashion. I remember last year when Dance New Amsterdam was finally facing its final hours: they put together a demonstration and were dancing in the rain. That was drama! There were cameras present! We don't really deploy the thing we already have in great supply, which is drama and theater and movement—along with the energy of younger people. Harness the Dance/NYC Junior Committee for the energy of today.
- I agree: I see tons of young dancers all the time, and they have so much energy! The 18-25 year-old choreographers and dancers is an amazingly large group, period. And it gets refreshed every year. Dance/NYC can be a place to push forward all of this information among this social media-frenzied generation.
- The Junior Committee is group of volunteers aged 19-30, and we meet here once a month at Dance/NYC. We have our own projects, programs, and ideas designed to support the overall aims of Dance/NYC. It's a healthy mix of artists, administrators, and educators, a pretty diverse group. We're currently executing the Dance Work Force census to count the numbers and earnings of the New York City dance community aged 19-35. The youngest member is aged 19, and there are 17-20 of us.
- Wow! That's a big team, and it sounds really strong! They represent a built-in cheerleader for [the rest of] us. And as I meet this ever-replenishing group of young people on this team, there's great potential to harness that group. That's an example of a smart initiative that's laying the foundation for maximizing this never-ending stream of young people coming into the city.
- I'm also involved with young people in dance, and what I find really interesting is that they "only know dance." Outside of that, they don't really know what else there is to do. Dance/NYC could bring them together for conversation about other opportunities that can lead to different types of futures. Dance/NYC as educator could be very useful in that respect.
- Yes, scores of young people are graduating from college dance programs every year, and perhaps Dance/NYC could be the first go-to place whenever new dancers come to the city. Dance/NYC could help them integrate into the city's dance community.
- Yes, there's nothing there for young dancers. Career Transition for Dancers is at the other end of the spectrum.
- Speaking of that organization, in my case, I wanted to make a change, but it was more about "evolution" than "transition," because I haven't finished dancing yet. I'm not ready to "transition" completely, yet. And there's not really information for my situation, yet I feel there are a lot of us 30-something former principal dancers who are trying to figure out what happens next.
- Dance/NYC can be uniquely positioned to offer a wide range of artist services, from incoming dancers to the city, to dancers looking to transition out of the dance career and into the other realms. Also, there are lots of people who work in these administrative sides of the field who are interested to pass that knowledge on to others in the field without becoming a consultant. The more seminars and workshops Dance/NYC could put together would be a terrific service to the field in the city.
- It sounds like we're talking about two things: technical assistance, and brokering relationships. Those are both really important.
- Yes, I particularly like the idea of Dance/NYC matching its constituents to others who have a similar passion.
- I think Dance/NYC already does play matchmaker and put us together with resources that already exist. Something happens in this city in dance every single day, and Dance/NYC can gather all that information and send us there. I like that it's not partisan, it doesn't make quality or taste calls, and it's the objective voice for everyone in dance. That's critical.
- Let's not forget the whole other world of social dancers in our community. They need help just as much as we do, but they probably don't know Dance/NYC exists. There is more work needed to let other dance segments know about Dance/NYC and what it offers.
- A lot of people I work with don't know about Dance/NYC or how they would fit into it. They need help understanding what is available, so I am talking about better industry marketing of Dance/NYC's existence and how it can help people.

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

- It's changed over time, but the biggest benefit to me has been the networking. I've met 6-8 great colleagues here, and that has formed a collegial group that can advise me and share information for the topics and issues I face.
- I appreciate the creative convenings that bring a larger group of colleagues together. My daily work is all-consuming, and so these broader convenings help me understand the state of the field outside my company's walls.

- We've done practical things like use the industry mailing list, but the thing that impressed me the most was the Mid-Season Symposium. That was incredibly helpful. [Show of hands: 4 others present also attended.]
- I worked with Dance/NYC on a college dance-specific event day.
- I became acquainted looking for audition notices.
- I found the artist service organization roundtables incredibly helpful. There would only be a hardcore group of 7-8 of us, but it was nice to have colleagues who were walking in your same shoes to talk things out behind closed doors.
- In general, if there were ever a dance-related question I didn't know the answer to, I went to their website to start, especially when I was new to the city.

With whom should Dance/NYC partner?

- Theatre Development Fund
- 92nd St Y - Harkness Dance Center
- The Field, Fractured Atlas, New York Live Arts, A.R.T./NY to cross-promote their existing artist professional development programs
- The Borough Arts Councils
- Lincoln Center's Midsummer Night Swing program
- I think Dance/NYC should look beyond the dance community to the ethnic and cultural organizations, the folk dancers, the social dancers. I was at another roundtable recently where people were talking about connecting these Americans to "art dance." But you have to talk about the dance they're already doing. That's their portal. Start with the folk dancing, and move them to the art dance.
- This summer, my company is partnering with Bryant Park, where they presented free tai chi and yoga, but never dance before. When we thought of high-profile partnerships, we thought of New York City Parks & Recreation Department. Imagine if dance had a place in every park in New York City during summer--that would definitely make a difference to our public profile!
- Schools: our public schools. It's that simple.
- The Times Square Alliance: if they can put 8,000 yoga people in Times Square last week, and get national television coverage, why not dance?!
- I liked the way that these meetings were organized by field affinity groups. I have space that I'm developing in my building and I need a brokering organization to go to, to help serve a lot of people. Dance/NYC could be that. Also, Community Board 3 for the East Village and the Lower East side is incredibly supportive of the arts. Those of you located down there should know that.
- Dance is an economic engine for the City, so if Dance/NYC had relationship with the Chambers of Commerce and so on, when the numbers came out, we could argue how many jobs we create.
- Also, health initiatives: did anyone else notice that when First Lady Michelle Obama wanted to tackle childhood obesity, she brought in Beyonce and taught dancing? She taught kids to *dance*, not *diet*! There's a message there about the universality of movement.
- When we speak about quantifying the impact of dance artists on the City, you should know that a lot of that work is done at the Borough Arts Council levels, and they are already advocating at the City, State and Federal levels about the impact of the artists in their communities. The smart thing would be for Dance/NYC to tell artists about the services already being offered by Borough Arts Councils, and to coordinate with them on the advocacy front.
- Perhaps Dance/NYC should work with New York & Company, the City tourism marketing organization, to increase our visibility to people who may not otherwise look to New York City for dance—only Broadway theatre.
- Partner with The Public Theater and Joes Pub.
- Don't forget about Jacobs Pillow Dance Festival in the Berkshires (MA)—which is practically New York City "North" because so many New York City artists use it!
- With such a small staff, the key is to figure out who's already doing the things that you identify as useful—and then send people there. If it becomes about working with young artists as they arrive in the City, I would say look to partner with associations of training programs. Let others deliver the programming, but have Dance/NYC build the referral framework.

- I think writers and critics can also help contribute to Dance/NYC, particularly its website. I wish there was a way to break down the old model of critics being on the outside and not having anything to do with performers. I'd like to be more of an insider, and to be seen as someone who can help the field to grow and expand.
- I agree. Writers are information brokers and we can help to add that resource to what Dance/NYC is doing online. We writers could make those resources and knowledge available.
- The American Dance Therapy Association might be a very interesting resource for you to examine.
- Having the Dance/NYC Junior Committee organize flash dance mobs across New York City—that's an obvious one!
- Does Dance/NYC run any kind of gathering for company dancers? I think it would be beneficial if the dancers from all the companies could get together and talk about things in the field. There's a big disconnect between dancers and what they understand about what's happening economically in our field. Dance/NYC could function as a hub where dancers could be educated, and also include students in Professional Training Programs—that could be really helpful to us managers.
- Don't forget about the Emergency Fund for Student Dancers. It gives free seminars at the beginning of school years.
- A.R.T./NY is a model worth looking at, but when you look at which service organizations serve theatre in New York, you have the Broadway League, which is the equivalent of the larger dance companies, then A.R.T./NY for the smaller organizations, while Theatre Communications Group is taking care of the League of Resident Theatres people. Because of the depth of the field, it takes three services organizations to cover the waterfront, which is not true anywhere else in the country. And then there's The Actors Fund, Broadway Cares—which partners with Dancers for AIDS, and Actors Equity, as well.

Imagine Dance/NYC as an independent 501(c)(3) service organization: how should it seek to support itself financially?

- You could start by looking at the model of the Arts & Business Council of New York in relation to Americans for the Arts, where we buy things like insurance and so on, but have our own board and autonomy. If you have the autonomy, it's great to have a relationship to a "mother ship" for the technical and administrative pieces. Also, I do think people are willing to pay annual membership fees of \$35-50 for things that are really useful to them.
- I think Dance/NYC is very limited if it has to keep this same structure as now. There aren't enough people involved, there are no exciting initiatives, and there is no Board. Dance/NYC could do so much more if it became its own organization, but perhaps a smaller version of that is just to start with forming its own independent Board to begin with, and to start committees that will get more people involved. That's the way to bring in non-dancers who love dance and want to be a part of it.
- Yes, when an institution has a Board, it has people who are committed to that particular institution and take onus and pride in its work, and they want to tell everyone all about it, and bring new people to it. Dance/NYC definitely needs this infusion of support. Actually, it could be fantastic, because in an organization this small, you can really belong to the dance, and also see the impact of your work, personally. The trick is to make an umbrella [so large] that there's an avenue for everyone to get involved, and they can't say no! And then keep involving all the younger people on the Junior Committee and so on.
- We have talked a lot about the unique needs of the field in New York City, and certainly it's a really positive thing if there are needs in New York City that don't align with Dance/USA programming, then you should break free to provide for those needs. But that also brings the question of dynamic balance between what you want to do, and the time it takes to do it. If you are independent, you spend a lot of time getting and keeping members, doing grant writing. It would be an amazing thing, and probably much stronger in the end, but you should look at the larger picture of how to accomplish it.
- I think a membership is fine, as long as the price point is right. I know I've just started forwarding Dance/USA information to my faculty and invited them to join. I think people would cover the two staff salaries just with membership fees.
- Also, when people pay membership fees, they feel value from it, they feel a part of it.
- As a working artist dealing with three jobs, while I'd like to see a free model, I know I will pay for it if I have to. I did it for what I needed from Fractured Altas, The Field, and others. I don't think imposing a membership structure will be a hindrance at all.
- I think price point is the key, and also designing relevant offers and benefits for that membership. In my experience, membership program administration can go awry and be very hard to manage if it's not well thought-out in advance. Other than that, I do think a fee-for-service model is completely viable. There's a different level of gravitas that people bring to something when they realize they've put out some money against it. Also, keeping the programming quality high and dynamic is key: a dynamic exchange where they're walking away thinking "Now I have the tools I need. I can start doing X tomorrow!"
- The League of American Orchestras provides new symphony trustees with orientation meetings. I would love to see a great workshop product at Dance/NYC for dance company board members who are new to the dance field. I would send them to

Dance/NYC to get educated without hesitation. They could also meet other board members from other dance organizations, and learn more about the field in general, so that you can be better prepared to serve on my Board.

- You might consider partnering with Arlene Schuler at New York City Center, or seeking her advice on Board training.
- I agree that the membership thing is helpful for specific-value things that are very targeted, However, I think that our culture now is about “it’s for free,” and so part of what Dance/NYC really has to do is raise its own public currency first, by becoming the organization that is expert and which has “all” the information. The Dance/NYC website has to be the place where people go to learn stuff without paying for it [at first], and then you monetize it by becoming “the” expert and selling that expertise in other forms. The more you’re seen as the place to go to for expert information, the easier the eventual monetization is.
- At The Field, a lot of the content is pay-per-use, and every year, we have a resurgence of new young dancers coming here from all over the county. I think they would consider joining Dance/NYC because at that point in a career, Dance/NYC represents a door into the community. It represents community, and that’s key for new arrivals. That pool replenishes every single year, and you have potential to refresh that revenue source each year.
- Yes, Dance/NYC could partner with university dance schools and offer a six-month free trial for graduating students.
- Also, when you set the price structure, remember that there will always be dancers and managers who work for larger companies, but who want individual services and memberships. Make sure you offer one.
- We talked about how much we want from Dance/NYC, and how limited you are, with just two staff members. Remember that we can be advocates for you, and we can be mobilized. There are a lot of us. Tell us what you want us to do.
- Yes, remember that Save the Children raised \$3M with a penny campaign around the world. Think of us as a multitude who can all give a little, if we get the request.

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