

DANCE/NYC COMMUNITY CONVERSATION # 3: MANAGERS & ADMINISTRATORS

4:30 -6:30 PM

Thursday June 7, 2011

Mertz Gilmore Foundation, New York

Attendees:

Jody	Arnhold		Dance Education Laboratory at the 92nd St. Y; Ballet Hispanico
Barbara	Bryan	Executive Director, Managing Director	Movement Research, John Jasperse Dance Company; Dance/USA Board Member
Amy	Cassello	Freelance Manager	
Amrita	Douglas		Dancenet
Joan	Finkelstein	Director of Dance Programs	New York City Department of Education
Sandy	Garcia	Director of Administration	Rena Shagan Associates, Inc.
Larry	Geddes	General Manager	Michael Mao Dance
Lauren	Gibbs	Deputy Director of Development	Ballet Hispanico
Elizabeth	Johanningmeier	Company Manager	Morphoses
Holden	Kellerhals	Company Manager	Paul Taylor Dance Company
Suzanne	Konowitz	Executive Director	Buglisi Dance
Elizabeth	LaCause	Executive Director	RIOULT
Aileen R.	Malogan	Producer	National Dance Week NYC
Christina	Paolucci	Executive Director	New York Theater Ballet
Jirina	Ribbens	Executive Director	Ice Theatre of New York
David	Sadowsky	Director of Educational Programming	American Repertory Ballet; former Dance/NYC Junior Committee
John-Mario	Sevilla	DEL Director	Dance Education Laboratory at the 92nd St. Y Skybetter Associates; Dance/USA Board Member
Sydney	Skybetter	Choreographer, Curator, Consultant	Arts and Business Council of New York
Fran	Smyth	Manager of Arts and Business Services	Stefanie Battan Bland Birdlegs
Todd	Stone	General Manager	Paul Taylor Dance Company
John	Tomlinson	Executive Director	Kegwin + Company
Andrea	Welshons	Managing Director	
<u>Regrets:</u>			
Jessica	Banks	Director of Development	Ballet Tech
Chantel	Bell		
Daniel	Feinstein	Grant Writing Consultant	
Yasmine	Fequiere		The Hip Hop Dance Conservatory
Irene	Hultman Monti		
Lourdes	Lopez	Co-Founder & Director	Morphoses
Leslie	Malmed Macedo	Executive Director	Flamenco Vivo Carlota Santana;
Sahasra	Sambamoorthi	Choreographer	Dance/USA Board Member

How many of you consider yourselves both an artist and an administrator?

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

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How have you interacted with Dance/NYC?

- I was on the founding advisory Board and have presented workshops about teaching careers. I have also attended events.
- I find the Dance/NYC workshops and the online email newsletters very useful.
- I appreciate the online resources, listings and ads.

- I use the Dance/NYC online calendar to post my events and see what's happening. I also use the online employment listings.
- I email Lane Harwell all the time with my questions about the field—he's been very responsive, and so has Lacey.

How have you interacted with Dance/USA?

- I have been a Council member in the past, and I receive the email newsletter.
- My company recently declined to renew our membership because money is tight and we have different budget priorities.
- I used to be a member, and so did the company I manage, but now we choose not to afford it, because it is expensive and we don't see enough value for our investment. Previously, we [my company] were members for the past 20 years.
- I've noticed a trend where companies are dropping their company memberships to Dance/USA, and the leader or executive director just signs up as an individual member to get virtually the same benefits and access.
- I was on the board of Dance/USA for six years, and we really grappled with that question of what is the benefit of membership? I agree it's expensive to participate. The national gatherings are useful; I was happy to see at the last national conference that there were subsidies for a number of younger participants to attend.
- My involvement has been limited to attending the annual Dance/USA conference.
- I'm on the email list serve, and appreciate how the information is distributed electronically.
- Mine is an individual membership—I don't know how my company uses its membership.
- When I think of Dance/NYC versus Dance/USA, I see Dance/NYC as local, inexpensive, and serving the local community with a very consistent place to meet, share ideas, and have an on-the-ground relationship with other members of the community. I see Dance/USA as more about national advocacy and research.

Can you describe some ways in which Dance/NYC serves the local dance field here in New York?

- Consulting services;
- Online calendar;
- E-blasts and list serves;
- The annual Symposium for networking and meeting colleagues;
- Dance/NYC provides opportunities to get people together;
- Advocacy, like testifying at the Department of Cultural Affairs hearings, and in the past, the "football campaign;"
- The Junior Committee is helpful for building upcoming leaders;
- The relationship with the Bessies dance awards;
- There used to be seminars and workshops;
- Provision of field meeting space;
- The calendar could be expanded to be more of an online resource for the community; e.g., there used to be a comprehensive listing of funding opportunities
- Along with the Bessies, there was more of an opportunity this year to bridge the uptown and downtown dance communities.

What jumps out at you as the most important thing that Dance/NYC does that no one else does?

- The Junior Committee to develop the next generation of leaders;
- The online calendar and listings are probably more comprehensive than any other, and also the organization embraces the entire dance community of New York City—it's not genre-based, or "uptown versus downtown" based.
- I find the workshops useful, because they are specific to dance and its [field] concerns. If you do them through other service organizations, they are less focused on dance, specifically, and more focused on performing-arts-in-general.

Who in New York City advocates for dance other than Dance/NYC?

- I believe that Dance/USA does some national lobbying for us.
- No-one; just Dance/NYC.

The American Ballet Theatre lobbyist's efforts end up impacting us all! **What about convenings? Who else does that?**

- The Association of Performing Arts Presenters does a meeting with Dance/USA at the annual conference every year.
- The New York State Dance Educators' Association has a convening every year in February, and the New York City Department of Education holds multiple meetings across the year for dance teachers.
- The Dance Parade, the Field, the Arts and Business Council of New York all hold public events.
- I'd add Dance Theatre Workshop, The Asia Society, the Emergency Fund for Student Dancers, Career Transition for Dancers, and Dancers Responding to AIDS to that list.

All right: in that context, with so much already going on, what makes Dance/NYC unique to you?

- I feel as though Dance/NYC offers more content for administrators.
- It feels a little easier to connect to Dance/NYC somehow; you usually know someone when you show up—it feels like a more distilled group of our community.
- Dance/NYC covers the broadest swathe of the community: every job role can find a place at Dance/NYC.
- Dance/NYC will refer you to one of its sister service organizations if that organization can help with your issue or question.

And as managers, how do your needs differ from artists?

- Dance/NYC offered a way for me not to get burnt out as a manager. We would gather in a confidential setting, and if someone else was having the same problems I was, I was able to get their advice in a room full of peers, with all of us comparing notes and learning from each other.
- Dance/NYC is a way to get referrals to trusted providers [for problems] without having to go to an expensive outside service.
- There isn't any other New York City-based organization that has an ongoing convening for managers. When I've attended Dance/USA, there's a managers' Council gathering—but not many of us travel there to attend those. Dance/NYC is our local version.
- As a manager, I really value the Dance/NYC convenings. Outside Dance/NYC, there are very few opportunities to meet with colleagues, to organize ourselves and be heard in the field.
- Yes, I agree: that was the greatest innovation that Dance/NYC brought—we all came out of our offices and spoke to one another! There was a platform created, and organizations with operating budgets of \$1M and under had an opportunity to speak confidentially and honestly and ask each other, "How are you doing your work?" We all found out that we were in the same boat; it was refreshing to hear "This is hard to do!"
- Yes, in that setting, you can reach out to ask any question about the infrastructure of your company and know you'll get honest responses—and a lot of them—from peers grappling with the same issues.
- I see, or hope to see, Dance/NYC has having a two-pronged opportunity: chatting about the practicality of the day-to-day running of dance organizations, of course—and secondly, giving us an opportunity to get together and talk about the big picture. That is, how are we all going to move this field forward? It's bigger than advocacy: our world is changing rapidly around us; we, as a group, need to get together and discuss that.
- Education is another big issue. We all meet one-on-one to discuss education programs, but we never actually have a chance to sit down all together and talk about a plan for the future—how we're going to build this field, and build a population in this city that is nurturing for the dance field. Many brains are better than one, I think.
- Dance/NYC can help us all communicate with, and to, each other what we're all doing: much of the time, we're doing the same work [as each other], but we don't know it! If we banded together, we could achieve more. Dance/NYC can help open those channels.
- Diversity is another big issue: what do we do about diversity of our audiences? They're lily-white!
- There are also many multicultural dance companies who are not represented here today—if we included them, we would expand our numbers and our thought dramatically.

- There's a panoply of difficulties that we all face, and I'm in favor of Dance/NYC and Dance/USA existing as a forum for collective thought work. There are no other spaces where we can get together to have these conversations and start imagining the future.

Are there dance educator issues that are different and exclusive?

- Some dance companies are big enough to have an education department, but in a way, it's viewed as separate from the core mission of the organization. I think we are all better served when that wall between education and artistic is made more permeable. There's more work to be done about how we can all work together to build a future for this art form.

Where do you get your professional development?

- I pick up the phone and call my colleagues!
- At Dance Education Laboratory, our sole purpose is professional development for dance educators. We have dance managers attend, also. We use the Dance/NYC online calendar to publicize our opportunities.
- I received some training through the DeVos Institute of Arts Management from the John F. Kennedy Performing Arts institute in Washington, DC.
- I found the Alliance for the Arts Arts Forum at The New York Times very stimulating.
- Dance/USA has management training retreats.
- New York Foundation for the Arts and the Nonprofit Finance Fund.
- The Better Business Bureau does a lot of seminars for fundraising.
- The Foundation Center, the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York, and the Support Center for Nonprofit Management.
- The Arts & Education Round Table and the Center for Arts Education.
- The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council is doing training now.
- Dance/USA just did a "Finance 201" course which I found useful, especially since about 90% of us are past the "101" stage.

Is there something in all this that's not being covered?

- To me, people aren't talking about the *future of the field!* How to engage people engage with our art form, and [in five years], is it still going to work to have 1,000 people sit in a theatre and watch dance?
- I've also become very interested in the future of the field and its implications for the future of our society. I perceive that there are two agendas out there: the "arts" agenda and the "education" agenda—but to me, they are one and the same. The education agenda has done a better job of embracing the arts agenda, but not the other way around. There are 200 arts educators in the school system, but there should be 1700, since that's how many New York City public schools there are. Those educators are trained as dance advocates, and they are training every child in every class to become a dance advocate. Those kids will grow up to be dancers, dance educators, dance literate adults, and dance audiences. It's the most important work we can do, and so I believe that you should not have Dance/NYC exist without embracing the school system and all that it means. My plea is for Dance/NYC to get at this gold mine of these young citizens who need to be nurtured and brought along in a continuum of dance and arts education, and to actively champion the "arts" community seeing the "education" community as an equal partner in nurturing the future of our field and its audiences.
- I think what's not being covered is us, as managers, having conversations about the future of the field. My experience in being a manager for over a decade now is that managers and producers are consistently left out of the conversations. There are select groups of presenters and organizations in closed conversations, spending a lot of time and money talking about this stuff, but managers are rarely at the table—which is crazy! I feel as though an elite group of presenters and artists is determining the funding agenda and representing our field. Dance/NYC should advocate to those funders that there's a broader group who should be part of the field conversation. They're only really getting a small slice of the spectrum now.

Upon whom do you rely for dance advocacy? How do you get your advocacy information?

- The Arts Alliance: I usually respond to the email activation alerts and circulate them to my colleagues.
- This is one thing that Dance/NYC and Dance/USA already do very well: sending out those e-blasts and forwarding things from Americans for the Arts for us to act on.
- I have a different view, and don't think that traditional advocacy tactics are particularly useful or effective. If it was, we wouldn't have all this acrimony at the Federal level when the topic of the performing arts come up.
- To me, advocacy means preserving arts and education in our public schools. I have a colleague who went to Albany and spoke to that topic. I don't think our efforts as a field are wasted.
- Still, what advocacy means to me is "a waste of time"—these are resources allocated to something that is not going to produce a return. Also, I view addressing funders as development, not advocacy, but others may disagree.
- I disagree with you. When I work with my international companies, there was a lot of advocacy in recent times to help streamline the visa processing service, and things do work better now. It's a lot faster to get the visas now than before we made all this big fuss about it.

What is the one thing can Dance/NYC do that would make your job as a manager easier or better?

- Content collection and dissemination: Dance/NYC is uniquely positioned to be a repository of the ongoing field conversation and to lead the tech curve on how the content of the conversations is disseminated. Dance/NYC should be an information hub.
- Dance/NYC could continue to be a resource of information and a central website of information offering us tools to meet colleagues and get the resources to do our jobs better every day.
- I would like to see a searchable online directory of members.
- I would go with the more dinosaur approach: I liked it when there was a regular schedule of meetings that I could put on the calendar—a meeting to just talk with whomever showed up. I miss that.
- I think Dance/NYC could be more proactive in actually educating all parts of the community about other parts of the community, including reaching out to the commercial dance world—there's a huge world of power and money out there! Dance/NYC could help all of us think much bigger about what is "dance" in our city.
- As I said before, I would like to see Dance/USA and Dance/NYC linking into the complete dance community, which includes dance education, and championing a conversation where every part of the community respects and supports each other, without a hierarchy about "art" versus "education."
- For me, Dance/NYC satisfies the white nonprofit dance paradigm that exists, but doesn't address the bigger philosophical issues of a grander, deeper vision of dance that addresses our cultural reasons for being. Dance/NYC could connect our work in the studio and onstage with the practice of people living and dancing naturally.
- As a producer and manager, I spend so much time worrying about the day-to-day, and how to get butts in the seats tonight, that I would love to hear how to get people in two years, five years: how to get people to be part of our world at that time. Dance/NYC could be really important in helping us to lift our sights and think forward to that time now, today.
- Dance/NYC should extend opportunities to new dancers from the conservatory or college trying to get into professional dance in the city. I see so many people coming into the city, and not knowing what to do next. Dance/NYC should be their hub.
- Dance/NYC has a role to play in educating presenters and advocating for dance over music, theater, and other art forms. As an agency, we see that presenters are presenting less dance—and those doing the bookings don't really know much about dance. Dance/NYC could educate and improve presenters' knowledge of our field.
- For me, Dance/NYC's most important role is to bring managers and artists together so we're all having the same conversation. If you knew that every two months, you could meet, that would be great.
- Yes, we used to have a schedule of regular gatherings by job role that I really valued. Those meetings were very useful. When you were floundering with a problem, you had a place to go. They weren't always big meetings, but they were regular, scheduled, and we knew we could go there and find some peer resources.

- Building on that point, I've been in the field for nine years, and I'm still meeting new people. I'd love for Dance/NYC to offer some social interaction opportunities where I could meet more colleagues and feel more embraced.
- I think Dance/NYC should do research for our whole field: more surveying across our sector, as well as the audiences.
- I think it's all about audiences: getting more and more people to see dance creates the kind of strength you need to get other things done. So Dance/NYC should focus on growing the dance audience first.
- I'd like to see Dance/NYC advocate with the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts for a streamlined application process—it takes so much time to apply and report!
- I'd like to see a lot more information on new business models for some of the things we have mentioned. How do we adapt?
- Maybe related to the idea of building an audience is a discussion around how to make better *art*. And how the education piece fits into it, and how all the relationships mesh together. Maybe the art isn't always as good as it could, or should, be. That could be something that Dance/NYC could convene panels about: how do we make our art *better*? Because everyone blames everyone else, but our audiences are voting with their feet.
- I'm not sure it's a question of the quality of actually—but more, that funders put all the work on the same plane. This means that the kid out of college is vying for the same pot of money as Paul Taylor Dance Company. Perhaps Dance/NYC could offer a forum for discussing new works out of college. What's a new model to us nurture young choreographers and help them make better art?
- I think Dance/NYC could be a great “platform for heresy!” Too often, I believe that service organizations are platforms for the status quo—but Dance/NYC could deliberately do and be the opposite, and serve a valuable field role.
- I do feel we have destroyed our own art form, to an extent. I don't go to a lot of dance in New York City anymore, because I've seen so much bad dance in the past ten years. And I work in the field!
- Yes, let's have “Convenings for Heretics!” If Dance/NYC is a place where “you don't have to be P.C.,” I think that would be a good thing.
- Dance/NYC could also mount convenings between artists and critics: it would be interesting to have the Dance Critics' Association in a joint panel with dancers and companies.
- I'd find it useful if Dance/NYC would offer a more extensive directory of choreographers, lighting designers, production designers, and so on through its website. I'd know where to look for people to mount my next show.
- I can't help noticing that we've come up with enough work for 10 people, here!

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