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The Philanthropy Dance

By Jasmine Rios



Pyrokinesis 2 © Cheryl Mann Photography 2009

A majority of dance companies are well-versed in the philanthropy dance - a metaphor of sorts, describing the pursuit toward educational outreach grant support. Often challenging, the footwork in this tap dance is a major production. Each step is pivotal to the next - it must capture, impress, and sustain the interest of a highly selective philanthropic audience.

In Act I, both artists and dance company administrators are in the spotlight - ensuring program concept/choreography is unique and seamlessly executed. Act II is a rather slow dance - the lengthy period which dance companies await their story's conclusion - either a happy ending/grant acquisition, or a not so happy ending/decline letter.

In-school performances and free/discounted theatre performances are common educational outreach programs.

They are excellent vehicles for making live performance more accessible and represent the cornerstone of most organizations' outreach. Often though, performance-based programs are the extent of some dance company outreach repertoires. To this end, dance organizations yet to embrace that funding toward these programs is diminishing, is cause for concern.

One official, director Craig Watson of the California Arts Council in Sacramento, offers some valuable insight: *"Many grant programs emphasize funding to help those in the greatest need in our society, but there are much deeper issues at play that involve the entire educational sector that needs to be examined here."*

He continues, *"There's been a gradual move away from the performance model for performing arts; more toward active participation for the students. Our own*

Artists in Schools program at the Arts Council requires professional artists to work with students on an ongoing level."

Sharing his expertise, Dance USA director Lane Harwell of New York says, *"The future of dance requires a fluid approach to dance education. New programs that serve unique constituencies or clearly meet alternative educational goals can create new ways for expanding the reach and impact of dance and attracting new support. Dance makers should think big and out of the box as they develop educational programs."*

A select few dance companies in Seattle, WA; Denver, CO; and Dayton, OH have created unique outreach programs that target specific populations such as incarcerated teens, children with multiple physical disabilities, women recovering from breast cancer, homeless citizens, and geographically isolated/financially



restricted communities. Programs as these exemplify the type of diversity grant makers are looking for today.

Concerned about the elimination of arts and physical education programs in Chicago schools, artistic director Nan Giordano of Giordano Dance Chicago (GDC) shares how her company developed an outreach program that satisfies grant maker goals and makes a difference in the community. *„We knew we wanted to expand the outreach program and include health and science. The students receive dance instruction from company dancers and our administrators teach basic anatomy, nutrition, and injury prevention. They're also taught how to take a pulse.“*

Created six years ago by former development administrator Tom Camacco, GDC's Health & Science program concentrates on 4th and 7th graders, when

science is more heavily introduced into the curriculum. GDC has ongoing partnerships with two schools: Swift and Pierce Elementary Schools in Chicago's Edgewater district and more recently – Stagg Elementary school in the Englewood district. *„No one goes into the Englewood area,“* says Giordano. *„It's very challenging, but we're passionate about serving these students. We send two teachers to Stagg and work with their 3rd and 6th graders since we had to tone down the program for them. There's a very under-served body of students where a large population doesn't speak English.“* GDC offers a variety of outreach programs; including the student performance program model. Giordano advocates the importance of student performance programs; at the same time she says: *„Any company can give away tickets. Our Health & Science program is so much more. We've really put*



Giordano Dance Chicago. Photo by Gorman Cook



Gardens Dance Chicago
Photo by Gorman Cook

ourselves out there... It's who we are."

Closing thoughts from director Craig Watson of the CAC: "All arts non-profits need to keep in touch with how schools are changing for their educational outreach programs. The traditional in-school assembly model may not be within many schools' reach these days. The dynamic of the school day has changed – a situation that has affected arts education across the board.... Another key component is the lack of in-school, daily dance education. According to 'An Unfinished Canvas,' an analysis from the Irvine Foundation in 2007, the percentage of schools providing daily, standards-based dance education in middle school and high school is in the single digits. Some exposure to the arts is

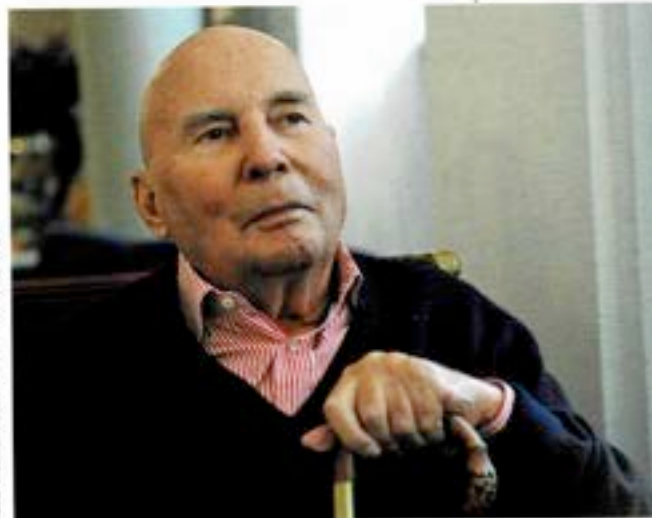
available in K-6 grades, but only about a third of schools have dance. Performances from professional companies are primarily utilized to complement an ongoing program in the schools. But if there are no ongoing programs, there's no base of study for the performances to enhance. It doesn't help that dance education rates are the lowest of the four disciplines (music, theater, dance, visual arts), as a school with music or theater classes is more likely to bring in professional music groups or theater companies than dance – if they bring in a performing arts company at all. These are circumstances we would like to see change, but it will take a sustained effort by several stakeholders to reverse these trends."

Lane Harwell of Dance USA concludes: "Proceed with caution in aligning mission, organizational capacity, constituent opportunity, and funder interest. Do what you are good at... not every dance maker can or should create programs for incarcerated teens even when there may be resources to do so."

Philanthropic goals change with the times just as dance; it's the process that does not. Outreach program standards will remain high and competition for these grants will only increase. To master the philanthropy dance is to design programs that speak to the philanthropic audience and program beneficiaries. Adding a curriculum component to existing outreach programs and/or creating new programs that address educational system shortcomings is key. The fruits of this labor may yield many happy endings/grant acquisitions, along with a much deserved standing ovation from that very hard to persuade philanthropic audience.

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Hans Werner Henze © Dresdner Semperoper

Die Semperoper Dresden trauert um den Komponisten Hans Werner Henze.

"Wir sind sehr traurig über den Tod Hans Werner Henzes, dessen Werke von großer Bedeutung für die Semperoper und die Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden sind", sagte Wolfgang Rothe, Kaufmännischer Geschäftsführer der Semperoper, im Namen aller Mitarbeiter. Der mit 86 Jahren gestorbene Komponist ist Anfang November in seiner Wahlheimat Italien beigesetzt worden. Henze war Ende Oktober während einer Konzertreise zusammengebrochen – eine Spätfolge seiner Parkinson-Erkrankung.