

Submission to the Cultural Commission from the Dance sector

January 2005

On 7 December 2004, Scottish Ballet convened a meeting of the key dance organisations in Scotland. This included those in receipt of core funding from the Scottish Arts Council, as well as the leading dance training institutions.

Citymoves – *dance centre for Aberdeen and the northeast*

Dance Base – *national centre for dance serving the Edinburgh area*

New Moves International – *promoter of the New Territories Festival and the National Review of Live Art, presented annually in Glasgow*

Scottish Ballet – *the national ballet company, touring work of all scales in Scotland, the UK and abroad*

Scottish Dance Theatre – *the leading contemporary dance company, touring to venues across Scotland, the UK and abroad*

Scottish Traditions of Dance Trust – *the national umbrella body for all of Scotland's traditional dance styles*

X Factor – *a contemporary dance company touring to small and middle-scale venues across Scotland*

YDance (Scottish Youth Dance) – *the national youth dance agency for Scotland*

Centre for Professional Dance Training, Telford College, Edinburgh – *offers Scotland's only degree course in Dance, as well as HND Dance Artists, and HND Professional Stage Dance.*

The Space, Dance and Theatre Facility, Dundee College – *The Space incorporates the Scottish School of Contemporary Dance and offers 3 and 4 year training in Contemporary Dance Performance through Foundation, NQ and HNC/HND courses. A degree course is being developed.*

These organisations together comprise the core of the dance infrastructure in Scotland and represent:

- a diversity of dance styles
- a range of scale
- an engagement with people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities as audiences and participants
- a geographic reach that extends across the country.

Collectively, these organisations provide Scotland with a complementary and strategic mix of dance provision. There is no duplication – indeed, the dance sector in Scotland is so small that there are significant gaps in provision across the spectrum. For example, in terms of professional producing companies, there is more demand from venues/promoters for high quality dance performances than can be met by the funded companies. And the excellent participatory programmes provided, for example, by YDance reach thousands of people each year, yet demand considerably outstrips the organisation's capacity.

The Dance sector is actively contributing to the development of Scotland's creativity, personal & social development, health & fitness; and we are providing inspiration and enjoyment to audiences across the country.

From this collective experience, we offer these key priorities for the Cultural Commission to consider as it sets out its vision of cultural development in Scotland for the next 25 years:

Support and develop the Dance infrastructure

The Dance sector in Scotland is young. Although Scotland has a lengthy and healthy heritage of social and traditional dance, opportunities to experience a wider range of dance styles only really emerged in the 1960s. This is in marked contrast to the other performing arts (drama & music), visual arts and literature, and relates directly to the marginalised position of dance within cultural policy and funding structures. This is beginning to change, but it is significant that the Scottish Arts Council only established a Dance Department in 2001 and that the only degree course (at Telford College) is just three years old.

The Scottish Arts Council's Dance Strategy was thoroughly researched, welcomed by the dance community, and has set out an excellent framework for building upon this fledgling infrastructure – it simply requires investment.

Within these key dance organisations, we have the expertise to flesh out the skeleton of this infrastructure – there is capacity to expand given the resources to do so. In some cases, there is scope to increase activity within the existing staffing complement, which means that any additional investment would translate directly into opportunities for people to engage with dance. In others, particularly in relation to the interface between dance and education, structural gaps need to be addressed.

Education

Within the formal education system, there is a critical need to strengthen dance within the curriculum and to develop a ladder of opportunity. This includes general participation for creative, social and physical development and fitness, but also in relation to nurturing talent and developing awareness of potential career opportunities. This must start when people are young and be provided for boys and girls equally, throughout the school years. Lifelong interest is usually sparked by a transformational, life-changing experience – and this is often linked to contact with professional artists/companies through either activities in schools or trips to the local theatre.

In contrast to other artforms – such as Drama, Music and Art & Design – which are clearly defined within the curriculum, dance is marginalised within Physical Education. Given the role of dance in developing creative and social skills and in nurturing physical and emotional well-being, we encourage the Commission to recommend that dance be considered for development as a discrete subject within the curriculum. (If we take just two examples of benefit from music and art that have long been embedded within school education, Scotland can today boast both school and regional youth orchestras and an excellent choice of Colleges of Art.)

Currently most dance activity for young people happens outside of the state system resulting in a disparity of opportunity. It is dependent upon the effort of individuals and the ability of parents/carers to pay the rates charged. The quality of provision varies widely and the range of styles available is very restricted, with little on offer that appeals to boys.

The need for quality dance teachers for schools can be addressed by extending training opportunities in F.E. and H.E as well as in-service training.

The advent of Cultural Coordinators was expected to increase and improve arts provision within school and the connection with professional artists and arts organisations. It was hoped that the Coordinators would simplify the process of professional artists engaging with the education sector, but our experience is that, on the whole, it has become more complex. This is because role and remit of these posts have been defined at a local level, with many posts providing artform-specific direct delivery of activity, rather than adopting a coordinating/facilitating role. Whilst there has been a noticeable improvement in some areas, the lack of a strategic approach at a national level means that provision remains patchy. In terms of strategic focus and equity of opportunity, a more successful model has been SportsScotland's Active Schools programme, which provides a consistent and structured approach to getting young people involved in physical activity.

Developing Talent

There is a critical need to develop vocational training in Scotland for young people who wish to become professional dancers and choreographers. Scotland has only one specialist high school for dance (the Dance School of Scotland at Knightswood Secondary School in Glasgow), and there is currently limited opportunity at Further/Higher Education level to train to professional standard.

Developing dance talent requires not only access to vocational training, but also regular opportunities to create and perform. This is currently hard to achieve even for Scotland's only two full-time companies (Scottish Ballet and Scottish Dance Theatre), since dance programming is generally underdeveloped in the regions and relies on subsidy and ongoing investment from both the SAC and venues.

To inspire young people as audience members, we also need venues across Scotland to offer a range of high quality work and to programme dance regularly.

Creating and presenting work

There is great potential to increase the audience for dance. Research indicates that a venue needs to programme a minimum of 6 professional dance productions each year in order to sustain an audience for dance (Scottish Arts Council Dance Audience Research, 2002). This is only just being achieved at the large-scale venues with visiting companies from elsewhere in the UK and abroad supplementing the limited number of Scottish productions. Few middle-scale venues reach the minimum number and virtually no small-scale venues are able to achieve this. Only by increasing the critical mass in provision will audiences for dance be sustained and further increased. Investment is required to enable more work to be produced in Scotland, and this should be balanced with resources for promoters to ensure that they are able to programme a range of high quality work on a regular basis.

Dance, by its very nature is an artform that involves multi-disciplinary skills, a variety of methodologies from the traditional to the unconventional, and appears in creative fusion with other artforms such as visual art, music and new technologies.

As such, dance has the ability to bring together divergent audiences who would not normally find themselves sitting comfortably side by side in a performance.

New Moves International programmes many such multidisciplinary dance artists in a live arts setting and in this way ensures that the Scottish dance context is informed by the presentation of innovative work that is already seen and valued within many European and International Dance Festivals.

It is important to the development of the Scottish dance sector, that we maintain the ability to foster the work of International dance artists and performers who use choreographic practices in innovative ways, alongside more mainstream work. This is one of the ways in which we will create the nurturing conditions for Scotland to 'grow' the inspirational multi-disciplinary dance artists of the future.

International outlook

Scotland should look for inspiration to countries with a similar sized population elsewhere in Europe (e.g. Finland, Denmark) where education systems and investment in professional dance companies has led to thriving dance scenes that make significant contributions to dynamic cultural sectors. There is also a real opportunity for Scotland to raise its profile through international cultural exchange and outward touring of its dance companies. Likewise, audiences in Scotland can derive real benefits from being able to experience the work of international dance companies, to complement the work that is created here.

Conclusion

With a focus on excellence, and not just social efficacy, Scotland has the potential to be a cultural superstate – we certainly have the talent. Indeed, although the dance sector is small, its successes are impressive – YDance recently secured a BAFTA Interactive Award nomination for its CD ROM, *321 Go!*, and both Scottish Ballet and Scottish Dance Theatre have won major UK awards over the past year. And these are just a few examples.

h: Scottish Exec\Cultural Commission\Dance sector – position paper - revised