

## **Submission to the Cultural Commission**

from a **discussion group of dancers** convened by  
Cindy Sughrue at Scottish Ballet on 30 November 2004.

The group met specifically to consider **what can be done to help artists work and thrive in Scotland**. The group discussed issues around the following questions:

- What are your aspirations as a dancer?
- What opportunities do you have in Scotland and how would you like to see these develop?
- How should talent be encouraged and developed in Scotland?
- How can we realise our potential as artists?

The following is a summary of the key issues and observations, which the Cultural Commission is asked to consider:

### **1. Current environment**

- 1.1 Dance culture in Scotland is small and underdeveloped, compared with other performing arts in Scotland (i.e. music and drama) and in relation to dance elsewhere in the UK, especially in England. The quantity and range of high quality work is limited, and therefore audience development is slow. This relates directly to the relatively low level of public funding that is invested in dance.
- 1.2 Nevertheless, there seems to be considerable potential, as evidenced by the award-winning transformation of Scottish Ballet. However, in order for this to continue, professional dancers and companies need to be better supported to create, present and tour work in Scotland and beyond. Moreover, there is an urgent need to underpin this with an appropriate infrastructure for dance within the formal education system, vocational training and continuing professional development.

### **2. Aspirations**

- 2.1 As professional artists, dancers have certain key aspirations:
  - To **perform more** – even Scotland's only two full-time professional dance companies (Scottish Ballet and Scottish Dance Theatre) are unable to provide their dancers with enough opportunities to perform, despite demand from promoters across Scotland for regular performances of high quality dance. This is because of the wide-ranging nature and scale of the network of performance venues across Scotland and the cost involved in producing the necessary range of work, as well as touring across a complex geographical area and a disparate population.
  - To be **challenged and fed artistically** by working with high quality creative teams and producing a variety of work (again, the issue here is resource limitations)

- To have **greater contact with existing and potential audiences**, including through work in schools and touring outside of the main cities
- To have **appropriate facilities** in which to train, create and rehearse (Scottish Ballet's current facility is in poor condition and too small for a company of this size – Scottish Ballet is the only full-time dance company in the UK that has not yet secured new premises, although there are plans in the pipeline subject to a successful bid to the Scottish Arts Council's Lottery fund.)

### 3. Development opportunities and needs

3.1 The focus group identified a number of areas that need to be developed:

- **Education** – there is a critical need to strengthen dance within the curriculum in terms of general participation, but also in relation to nurturing talent and developing awareness of potential career opportunities. People need to be able to see ballet/dance and to feel entitled to like it or not – but this requires regular exposure to a range of dance styles, which must start when people are young (and therefore through school). Lifelong interest is usually sparked by a transformational, life-changing experience – and this is often linked to contact with professional artists/companies through either performances in schools or school trips to the local theatre. With appropriate resources, there is scope for Scottish Ballet to develop dance productions specifically for touring to schools to complement its existing programme of matinee performances for schools.
- There is also a need to develop **vocational training** in Scotland for young people who wish to become professional dancers – there is currently no opportunity at Further/Higher Education level to train to professional standard in ballet, despite the fact that Scottish Ballet offers the majority of job opportunities for professional dancers wishing to pursue a performance career.
- **Serving people across Scotland** – There is a **need to develop a regular pattern of dance production and touring to venues of all scales across Scotland**. (At present, Scottish Ballet's activity in Scotland is mainly limited to the large-scale venues in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness, although even at this scale Scottish Ballet has insufficient resources to provide these venues with the range of repertoire they need to further develop the audience. Work designed for large-scale venues can rarely be accommodated at middle and small-scale venues; therefore, to reach communities across Scotland, it is necessary to create programmes specifically for different scales).
- 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 Scottish Ballet 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.

- **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. This will also provide dancers/companies with the positive challenge of exposure to new and larger audiences and performing alongside the best international companies.

Cindy Sughrue  
Administrative Producer  
Scottish Ballet  
23 December 2004