

## *Dance Ontario Association*

### *dancelinks festival 1994*

#### **NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY**

#### **METROPOLITAN TORONTO'S CULTURE SPECIFIC DANCE COMMUNITIES**

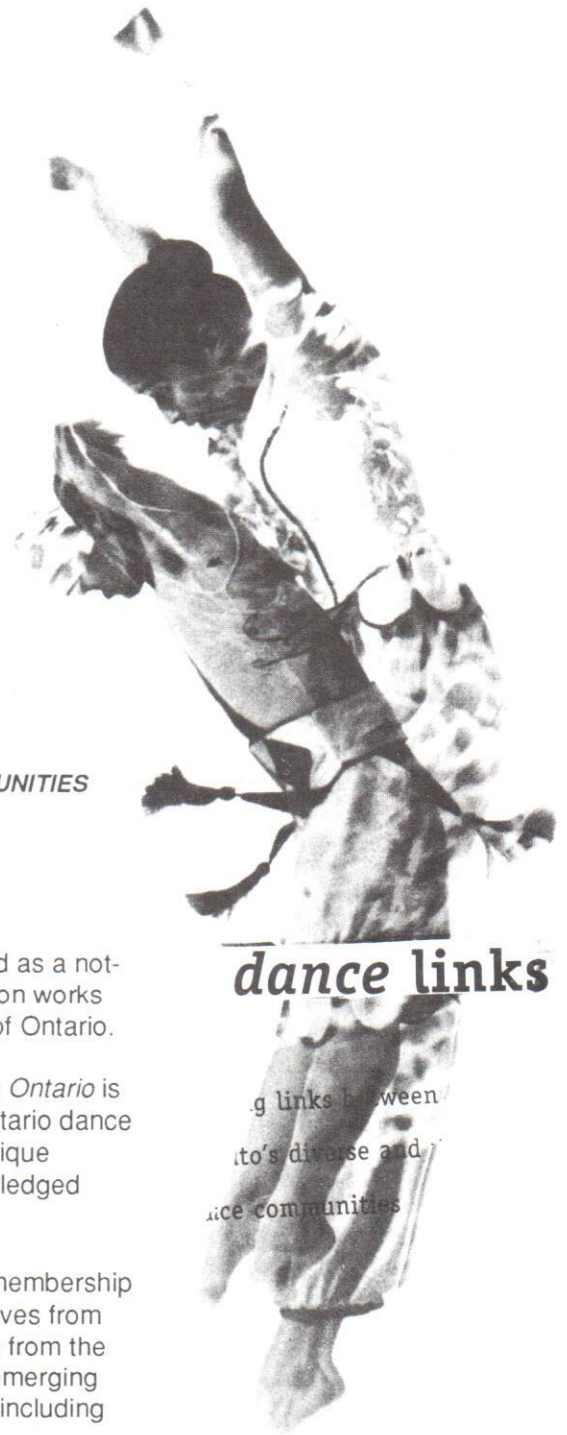
## THE ASSOCIATION

*Dance Ontario Association* was founded in 1976 and incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 1982. The membership-based Association works towards the promotion of development of dance in the Province of Ontario.

In addition to publishing *Headlines*, a bi-monthly newsletter, *Dance Ontario* is also responsible for an annual Directory, a "who's-who" of the Ontario dance community, and the *Ontario Dances Diary*. Recognition of the unique contribution of individuals to the development of dance is acknowledged through the annual *Dance Ontario Award*.

The organization lobbies and advocates on behalf of its diverse membership to all three levels of government, and also gives support to initiatives from its members which address topical issues. Membership is drawn from the major dance companies and schools; independent dancers and emerging collectives; ethno-cultural groups and other dance professionals, including reviewers and critics, and professionals in the health sector.

General services to members include events listings, referral for classes, professional schools and management/production services; In-house Reference Library; Data base access; and performance opportunities. The organization also enters into partnerships within the community i.e. DAN/CE, Dance Community of Educators, Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists (CADA), originally a project of Dance Ontario, Arts & Health Alliance (AHA!), and meets regularly with other dance service organizations such as Dance Umbrella of Ontario, Dancer Transition Centre, CAPDO, and Dance Collection Danse.



**dance links**

g links between  
to's diverse and  
dance communities

## THE ADVISORS

Over the past two years, *Dance Ontario* has been guided by a Board of Advisors who serve as our eyes and ears across the province. These volunteers keep us current regarding regional issues and special interest concerns. Without their invaluable input, we would be unable to function as a provincial organization.

**Zelma Badu**, choreographer, performer and dance instructor, trained at the National Ballet School of Canada, L'Academie des Grands Ballet Canadiens, The Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, Dance Theatre of Harlem and the University of Ghana School of the Performing Arts. She has a BFA in Dance Choreography from Concordia University (Mtl), and an MFA in Dance Ethnology from York University (Toronto), and has lectured and led workshops for York University, Temple University (PA), Simon Fraser University (BC), the International Conference of Dance Research (Mexico), and the Committee for African-American Observances/Dreamkeepers (South Carolina), as well as in schools across Metropolitan Toronto. Badu's choreography has been presented in Montreal and Toronto, and she was a Dora Mavor Moore nominee for her work Torgbewo Metrova.

**Sarah-Jane Burton** teaches movement and dance to actors, musicians, dancers and opera singers at the University of Toronto and at Sheridan College where she is head of the Dance Discipline. She is a freelance director and choreographer of musicals, operas and plays, as well as director/choreographer of a small theatre/dance company in Guelph. She formerly was a principal dancer/actress on Broadway for Agnes de Mille and Michael Bennett; danced in the Chicago Opera Ballet Company and toured with Ruth Page's International Ballet Company. She is also a Certified Movement Analyst and will be teaching in Paris this spring.

**Marie-Josée Chartier** began her dance career with La Compagnie de danse Pointépiénu touring extensively in North America and Europe. In 1982, she moved to Toronto and has since been extremely active as a dancer and vocalist in more than 60 original works. As an independent choreographer, Chartier has presented critically acclaimed works, including studies for the human body commissioned and performed by Dancemakers. This and other works have been featured on television. Chartier has been active in developing the Ontario Chapter of CADA.

**Jacque Foesier**, L.I.S.T.D., C.S.B., is Co-founder and Administrative Supervisor for the Me'irim Dance Company, and director of the Koffler Centre of the Arts School of Dance, Jewish Community Centre of Toronto. Mr. Foesier has been with the school since 1958, and today, with over 600 students, the school's reputation for high calibre training is well known throughout the Canadian dance community. He is also Education Director for the Etobicoke School of Dance, a project of The Danny Grossman Dance Company, former Chair of Dance Ontario, and past President of the Ontario Branch of the Canadian Dance Teachers Association (CDTA).

**Candice Helm** received her professional training at The Royal Winnipeg Ballet Professional Division and The National Ballet School Teacher Training Programme. She holds licentiate status with the I.S.T.D. (Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing) since 1985. Ms Helm has been teaching full time for The Quinte Ballet School for the past nine years. She has also taught dance courses at Ryerson Polytechnic University. Also a dance accompanist, she has conducted training courses for the Quinte Ballet School.

**Maxine Heppner** is a choreographer, dancer, performer and teacher who brings energy, humour and an approachable humanistic vision to all her work. She continuously develops her repertoire of ensemble and solo pieces for international dance and theatre companies, film and television. She is a highly regarded dance, theatre and improvisation teacher throughout North America and Asia, and has been active in developing the Ontario Chapter of CADA.

**Merrilee Hodgins** is co-founder and general manager of The School of Dance (Ottawa). She is also responsible for children's programming, professional programme studies and curriculum development. She was principal dancer with the Alberta Ballet and later worked in Denmark, Germany and the United States as a freelance artist. Ms Hodgins has choreographed for the Alberta Ballet Company, the CBC and several musical theatre companies. Ms Hodgins has served as an artistic advisor to the Ontario Arts Council, is a member of Cultural Leadership Committee for the City of Ottawa, and is a Director of the Celia Franca Foundation.

**Pam Johnson** is a dancer, choreographer and teacher who has worked in Toronto since 1982. She holds an M.A. from York University and has studied technique and improvisation extensively in Canada and the U.S. She is a co-founder of dance producers *The Illuminations* and dance buskers, BO MON 7 PAGOLAC. Her choreography has been presented at fFIDA, Dances For A Small Stage and in many self-produced events. She has also choreographed for theatre (*By A Thread*, Tarragon); film (*Zero Patience*, *Million Dollar Babies*) and rock climbers (*High Xposure*). She is a faculty member of the Theatre School of George Brown College and frequently teaches her speciality, Contact Improvisation, in schools, universities and private institutions.

**William Lau** was born in Hong Kong and raised in Montréal. He graduated from York University with a Master of Fine Arts degree in Dance. Trained in both Western classical ballet and Chinese dance, he now specializes in Chinese operatic dance. He has performed nationally and internationally over the past 15 years. In recognition of his artistic achievement, William became the first recipient of a Canada Council grant under the Chinese dance category in 1990. He has a broad career base ranging from performer, arts administrator, producer, and researcher.

**Gina Lori Riley**, born in Windsor, founded Gina Lori Riley Dance Enterprises in 1979, and is currently Artistic Director and choreographer for the group which is southwestern Ontario's only professional dance company. Ms Riley received her B.Sc. degree in Dance Kinesiology from the University of Waterloo and has since studied in England and the United States, as well as in Canada. The recipient of numerous choreographic grants, she has choreographed over three dozen works and been commissioned by several organizations to produce new works. In 1992, she was instrumental in orchestrating an unprecedented tour of the Arctic's Central Keewatin and Baffin Regions.

**Joysanne Sidimus** was born in New York and studied at the School of American Ballet. She was a member of the New York City Ballet, and then joined London's Festival Ballet as a soloist and, subsequently, the National Ballet of Canada and the Pennsylvania Ballet as a principal dancer. She has taught for many major companies, and her on-going relationship with the Balanchine heritage has included stagings of his work. Erik Bruhn invited her to stage *Serenade* for the National Ballet of Canada and to be guest ballet mistress for the Tribute to George Balanchine. She is currently Ballet Mistress for both the Company and School whenever Balanchine repertoire is concerned. She is Executive Director of the Dancer Transition Centre and serves on the Board of Directors of Performing Arts Lodges of Canada. In addition to receiving the Dance Ontario Award, in 1993 she received the Governor General's Commemorative Medal for the 125th anniversary of Canadian Confederation for services to the arts community.

**Rina Singha**, founder of the Kathak Institute (Toronto) trained under the great guru, Shambhu Maharajji of Lucknow. She has earned international acclaim for the elegant beauty of her dance, the purity of her technique and the contemporary wisdom of her interpretive powers. A professional solo performer since 1961, Rina has received several performing and choreographic awards.

**Tama Soble** has been choreographing and performing for fifteen years. Her work has appeared in the repertoire of dance companies and solo artists across Canada, the USA and in Mexico. She was assistant artistic director with TIDE (Toronto Independent Dance Enterprise) and later co-founded the Twirling Thespians. In addition, she has performed and choreographed for theatre and film. Currently she is collaborating with director D.D.Kugler on a language/movement work on taboo behaviour.

**Dr. Barbara Soren** is a teacher, researcher, and educational consultant. She is currently teaching The Dance Experience to over 200 non-dance students at York University, and is Project Manager at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education for an Inclusive Schools Research Project, an inventory of school-based strategies to enhance the academic achievement of Black and other racial/ethnocultural minority students. She is co-founder of DAN/CE: Dance Community of Educators, a network of dance educators, artists and administrators created to provide opportunities that will link the community of professionals committed to educating the public about dance.

**Katherine Watson**

Unavailable at time of publication.

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

*"Dance in Metropolitan Toronto is dynamic, diverse and continuing to develop due to the energetic, unflagging dedication and passion of teachers, dancers, choreographers and organizers. The quantity and quality of dance in this broad community should make us all sit up and take notice. Dance is a significant part of people's lives. This can be a cultural expression where dance and music continue the link to heritage, and the richness of this expression is shared through public presentations. It can be the enjoyment found in dancing together; a creative statement where movement is the language that expresses an artist's vision, or the exploration of dance forms and cultural influences combined to achieve a new expression. No matter how you look at it, dance is an exciting, vital expression of human culture and community. In Metropolitan Toronto, we have tremendous opportunity to share this abundance".*

Jennifer Watkins, Group Leader

During the past year, Toronto's dance community has been involved in re-evaluating its priorities. Leaders of the various dance communities have joined together to envision dance artists' long-term needs, and to studying the feasibility of a permanent dance centre.

The future looks somewhat bleak. Economic constraints will continue in the corporate sector, and special interest groups will lobby to prevent and/or decrease tobacco and alcohol sponsorships for arts organizations. While government funding to the arts for the next few years will be cut, access has been expanded, resulting in increased competition for limited funds. A unified approach to these problems is essential in order to protect and nurture Metro's extraordinarily rich and diverse dance community.

The mandate of *The Dance Ontario Association*, is to promote and develop all forms of dance. It is taking an increasingly strong role by bringing together different sectors to look into specific needs of communities/forms which, although flourishing, may have remained isolated from the general community. Together we can develop short and long term strategies which will set national standards and ensure a healthy future for dance in Toronto.

In preparation, we have conducted a needs assessment within the ethno-racial, aboriginal and ethno-cultural communities in order to identify specific concerns/problems within these sectors, as well as those issues common to all. The survey (see attached form) which, for the most part, was conducted through one-on-one interviews, addressed concerns which included:

- training;
- presentation of artistic product both in community venues and those categorized as mainstream;
- support, guidance and access to funding;
- input into the selection of, as well as development of cultural literacy for jury members and assessors, etc.

The communities surveyed were South Asian, People of African Descent, Asian, Aboriginal/Indigenous, South American and European.

The following is a brief overview of the results which will be presented in more detail at the forum.

## GROUP LEADERS

### **Lata Pada** (South Asian)

Dancer, teacher and choreographer, Lata is an internationally acclaimed exponent of the Bharat Natyam classical dance form. Originally from Bangalore, India, she has resided in Canada for 30 years and is recognized as one of the country's leading performers and teachers of the form. She is founder and director of the Sampradaya Dance Academy. Currently, she is pursuing a Masters in Fine Arts (Dance) at York University.

### **Vivine Scarlett** (People of African Descent)

Vivine Scarlett is a dancer/choreographer who has performed and instructed African and African derived dances for over ten years. She was Artistic Director of Usafiri Dance & Drum Ensemble, and also has considerable experience as an administrator. Vivine recently produced her own children's production of [Who's In Rabbit's House?](#) and is researching dance artists of African descent in Ontario. She is Cross Cultural Coordinator for Dance Ontario/DanceWorks and will curate the dance component of CELAFI 1997.

### **Edie Shaw** (Asian)

Edie Shaw is a Toronto-based modern dancer, teacher and choreographer. In Toronto she has been a member of Northern Lights Dance Theatre and has danced as an independent for Randy Glynn Dance Project, Darcey Callison and Paula Thomson, among others. She has also been a member of Muna Tseng Dance Projects and Ze'eva Cohen and Dancers in New York. Her choreography has been presented in DanceWorks' CoWorks Series, at fFIDA, and Dances For A Small Stage. In recent years, she has been concentrating her efforts within the realm of dance teaching and has developed a reputation as one of the foremost specialists in Limon technique in the Toronto area. She has been on the faculty with Canadian Children's Dance Theatre, The School of Classical and Contemporary Dance at George Brown College, and is a frequent guest artist at numerous high schools and universities, including Earl Haig, Cawthra Park, York University and the University of Waterloo.

### **Audrey Langer** (Aboriginal/Indigenous)

Born on a reserve in Saskatchewan, Audrey Langer has lived in Ontario since 1966. She has raised five children and is currently active in Native Women in the Arts.

### **Jennifer Watkins** (South American/European)

Jennifer Watkins holds a BFA degree from York University with special honours in dance. Following graduation she continued her dance training at the School of the Toronto Dance Theatre as well as exploring other modern and jazz styles in Toronto and New York City. After struggling for several years performing in independent productions, theatre and film, she realized it was time for a new direction. Since then she has worked as an administrative assistant and tour manager for the Danny Grossman Dance Company, managed the Young Audience Division for R.H. Entertainments and was General Manager of the Dance Umbrella of Ontario. Always looking for new challenges, Jennifer has just started *Open Arts*, her own arts administration company.

## South Asian Community

### Groups Interviewed

Menaka Thakkar  
Natasha Bahkt  
Joanna Das  
Johanara Akhlaq  
Deepti Gupta  
Bindu Shah  
Janak Khendry  
Meena Rajagopal  
Niharika Mohanty  
Rina Singha

### Challenges

- Many dancers feel their dance training is inadequate, and wish that they could make it possible to train with their original teachers or gurus in India. This would ensure that they would not have to change styles under new teachers and be able to maintain and practice repertoire that has been learnt.
- Lack of flexibility on the part of Canadian teachers in allowing their students to enhance their training by working under other teachers and adapting to new styles. Lack of opportunities to perform because they are not given permission to be contracted to other dance companies.
- Lack of affordable studios that are well equipped with mirrors and proper dance flooring and storage space.
- Availability of freelance professional dancers who could be contracted for professional productions. Most South Asian dance choreographers use their senior students for productions in their home cities, but face difficulties in being assured of their commitment when they want to tour.
- Availability of trained musicians to accompany dance recitals. Most dancers feel that performing to taped music does not provide the rich artistic experience.
- Indian dance has so far been restricted to the community organization circuit which is not geared to organizing and presenting professional productions that require adequate performance venues with proper lighting and sound facilities.
- Difficulty in accessing mainstream presenters. The common problem is that there is a lack of appreciation for traditional classical performances that are considered culture-specific; the very few that are booked by presenters are those that have been innovative and experimental in nature. This leads to undue pressure to create new works that are perceived to be non-traditional in theme, content and presentation.
- Curation of Indian dance festivals in Canada can add to the pressure for new choreography in Indian dance, unless sufficient opportunities for showcasing traditional and classical work are included.
- Funding bodies also seem to encourage only new work and there is not much support for the remounting of choreography from a traditional repertoire. A general comment is that juries are not sufficiently familiar with or knowledgeable about the Indian dance forms in order to assess auditions or proposals by dancers trained in Indian dance.
- Availability of knowledgeable dance reviewers to critique Indian dance in major newspapers. This results in problems related to educating general public about the various forms of Indian dance.
- Unfamiliarity and inexperience with procedures for grant applications. Unreasonable degree of detail is required and a large amount of time and resources are needed to prepare proposals.
- Most dancers wished they were in a position to hire agents, administrative help and tour managers. They feel they would greatly benefit from this kind of support, freeing themselves to pursue creative work. Some dancers interviewed had been using the services of Dance Umbrella of Ontario in the areas of grant applications, publicity and promotional support, as well as general guidance.

## Asian Community

### Groups Interviewed

Meyong Kim Dance Group: Korean Folk, traditional

Mr. Shao-Hui Kang: Chinese folk, Mongolian, modern ballet hybrid

Toronto-Chinese Dance Academy: Chinese traditional and modern Chinese

Sakurakai/Ayame-kai: Japanese folk, classical

Li Ling Dance School: Chinese folk, classical and modern Chinese

Chi Ping Dance Group: Chinese traditional, classical and folk

This was a small, random sampling of Asian dance groups representing Korean, Japanese, Chinese and Mongolian dance.

### Common Situations

- Most interview participants held full-time jobs or were supported by a spouse in order to support their dance activities.
- All were teachers of the dance forms they specialized in (although to varying degrees of involvement) and all performed dance publicly in varied situations.
- As educators, most taught primarily children and their primary motivation for teaching their form of dance was to pass on a cultural tradition of dance to younger generations in order to cultivate the children's appreciation of their cultural heritage.
- All the participants expressed an interest in performing for new audiences outside their respective cultural communities in order to educate and, by doing so, help foster appreciation and understanding of their form of dance, and their cultural heritage in general. It was, in fact, one group's mandate to do this.
- All but one of the participants who expressed a desire to pursue more performance opportunities stated that they were eager to learn about the resources which might be available to them to assist them in achieving their training, performance and professional goals.

### Common Needs and Deficiencies

- The vast majority of performances were done on a non-paying basis, by invitation. The participants rarely initiated their own performances and did not know how. Although they stated they wanted to be able to perform more on a paid basis, none had sufficient knowledge or resources to pursue this. They primarily relied on presenters such as cultural associations, mall owners, etc. to provide performance opportunities (albeit for little or no pay).
- All the participants who directed their own performing groups expressed frustration at not having needed administrative assistance to help administrate, promote and run their organizations. All typically put in a great number of hours not only in teaching and rehearsals, but also administration, costume-making, etc., in addition to working full-time jobs.
- None of the participants were aware of the full range of resources available to them, including grants and administrative services, and the majority expressed intimidation or discomfort in approaching these organizations, partially due to a perceived language barrier. Even those fluent in English felt they lacked a knowledge of the nuances of the English language to determine what the funding bodies wanted to be told in order to be successful at applying for funding.
- All the performing groups that stated they wanted to achieve a higher level of professionalism expressed frustration that a lack of funding prevents them from being able to focus on the rehearsal process. It also affects production quality, the ability to train better dancers and to bring in experts or masters. There is little opportunity for professional development in these dance forms and most felt "cut off" or isolated in their pursuit of higher standards, as there is little or no exchange between similar groups in terms of development and training.
- Overall, there is a cultural bias against the pursuit of dance as a full-time occupation. Dance holds very little status in traditional Asian society. So, although their communities might support the training of their children in the cultural dance forms, there is little community support for pursuing dance as a career.

## **Artists of African Descent**

Survey participants performing dance styles of the African Diaspora included dance professionals, emerging artists, and schools for children. Styles included traditional African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, ballet, jazz and modern. Many reflected on their background, heritage and culture as their expression and choice of dance style. These organizations and individuals have contributed greatly to the Canadian dance community as participants, educators and organizers.

## **PARTICIPATING GROUPS**

Afro Caribe Performers - Andrea Douglas  
Afro Caribbean Youth Program - Joan Jeffers  
Arabesque Dancers - Yasmina Ramzy  
Ballet Creole - Patrick Parsons  
Cانبoulay Dance Theatre - Ronald Taylor  
COBA (Collective of Black Artists) - Eddison B. Lindsay  
Isintu Dance Theatre - Setlhabi Taunyane  
Makpoloo Dance Initiative - Zelma Badu  
Sankofa - Joseph Addai  
Scarborough Caribbean Youth Dance Ensemble - Yasmin Brito

## **Needs**

- Better understanding of specific dance styles. Dance style is looked upon as exotic, a tourist attraction and not taken seriously.
- More support - though more performance opportunities are available for those who pursue it at a professional level.
- Studios that accommodate traditional music (drums) are few, people are forever moving around to find adequate space in which to rehearse with musicians.
- Affordable rehearsal space with proper floors, mirrors and sound system.
- Ongoing training for dancers and musicians
- Experienced dancers doing traditional styles.
- Presenters who will take chances with culturally diverse groups. Most groups are seen as culture specific or considered exotica. They get most performance opportunities for African History Month events, Caribana and summer tourist attraction presentations. The dance style is seen as multicultural dance with a stigma attached.
- Funding agencies need to be more inclusive as a whole, to look at the full picture of our specific community and the request for our needs. When applying for funding, companies doing traditional work always have to justify its validity.

## **Suggestions**

- Dance artists want to be recognized as dancers doing what they do because they choose to not because of their race. Many feel they are being judged as Black dancers as opposed to dancers who are Black.
- Organize more workshops, lectures and performances to educate the general public about what we do.
- Presenters need to be a little more open to new styles and companies and see our dance as a form of art as opposed to an exotic explosion.
- More exposure to the broader dance community through presentations that include all dance styles
- Defining what we need for us instead of funding agencies dictating what we should do. and telling us what is good for us and our work.
- Development of companies' and individuals' access to and understanding of publicity, marketing, media and the system in general.



## Aboriginal Community

Although a number contacts were made within Metro's aboriginal dance community, we were unable to gain the degree of access which we had enjoyed with other communities. As a result, *Dance Ontario* will be holding a dance circle in the Spring of 1995 when it is hoped that we will be in a better position to report on the community's needs.

In the meantime, Group Leader Audrey Langer, furnished the organization with information on needs identified at a Circle held in 1993.

### Needs

- commitment to traditional dance, a serious, responsible approach
- to go back to the roots
- the non-Native community needs to be educated about the form so that it is more sensitized to Native tradition and culture and does not use Native people to promote non-Native events or misrepresent them in general
- recreational and cultural activity for children/dance workshops for youth
- knowledge of how to become involved in traditional dance in Toronto
- importance of having a specific space for Native people to train and work
- to feel "connected" to other dance forms - many Native artists feel alienated from European forms citing lack of self-expression
- technical knowledge of stage lighting, sound, etc.
- to know which dances, songs, etc. are not for stage
- Native designers
- to know funding agencies, how to prepare budgets, who has the power and where it is being directed
- unions, Equity etc.
- more participation between performer and audience as it was with traditional audiences
- to experiment with work and not feel imposed limitations. Community support for same.

### Barriers

- dancing for competition, not based on a true commitment
- lack of funds for dance outfits
- difficult to connect Western European dance forms with our culture
- lack of cultural and recreational activity for children. Children and parents
- lack of self expression and heart in non-Native institutions or by our own people
- audiences who look for superficial detail, rather than understanding the essence of dance.
- wasting energy to find funds, space, administrative support, etc.
- isolation from our own communities

### Resources

- other artists, Toronto community and our own communities and Elders
- the talent on reserves and local communities
- our traditions

- Inadequate funding to afford good lighting design and technical help, resulting in production values sometimes being compromised. No funding to do multiple shows.

#### Suggestions

- A great need for audience development. This could be achieved by increased exposure to Indian dance through dance festivals in mainstream venues, workshops and lecture-demonstrations. Audience development should be pursued on an ongoing basis.
- Integrate community and mainstream audiences for best performance experience for dancer/company.
- Showcase Indian dance by sharing the stage with dancers of other forms, and therefore increase awareness of and appreciation for Indian dance.
- Opportunities for choreographic labs in traditional and experimental dance.
- Invitations to master teachers and opportunities to train with them.
- Opportunities to invite renowned choreographers to set their choreography on local dancers/dance companies.
- Establishment of a co-op for Indian dancers to share resources, studio space, musicians and performance opportunities. Advance notice of visiting musicians (experienced in working with dancers) so that performances can be planned or music recorded for new work.
- Funding should be geared towards independents who work on short term projects.
- Funding should be for the full amount applied for so that the complete scope of the project can be attained.

## South American & European Communities

### Groups Interviewed

Ukrainian Academy of Dance	Irish Dance Teachers Association of Canada
Polynesian Music & Dance Association	Kalinka Russian Dance Company
Danse Baroque Toronto	Royal Scottish Country Dance Society
Ontario Folk Dance Association	Huairapungo
Grupo Azteca	Folklore Inka
Patti Milne (Inside Out Productions)	Arte Falmenco Spanish Dance Company
Esmeralda Enrique Spanish Dance Company	

Through the Spring and Summer of this year I was able to meet with more than a dozen individuals or groups involved in a wide variety of dance forms and styles. They included: Scottish Country Dancing; Irish Step, Ceili and Set Dancing; traditional and folkloric dances from Ecuador, Mexico and Peru; ancient and contemporary Polynesian styles (Hawaiian, Tahitian, Samoan and Maori); classical and contemporary Spanish; Flamenco; European Historical Court Dance from the 16th-18th century; traditional Ukrainian; Ballet; Modern; Russian Character Folk/Ballet; American Jazz; International Folk dance.

This is what I discovered through conversations and interviews with dance practitioners across Metro while carrying out my part of *Dance Ontario's* Needs Assessment Survey.

- Many of these groups, even some of the larger and more established ones, are interested in maintaining cultural forms through community and social participation only.
- All individuals or groups have great commitment to their dance form.
- Most individuals and groups are interested in seeing, if not learning, other dance forms and styles (many are actively involved in these pursuits).
- Even when groups perform in cultural festivals, all feel that their performances are open to everyone.
- All individuals or groups do not have the same knowledge of resources.
- Although basic training is available in many of these forms, most training is received by travelling to the country of origin or to the U.S.A., or, on rare occasions, when a guest teacher is brought in.
- Most groups had similar basic needs related to better conditions required for the development and presentation of their dance forms.

The most commonly stated needs in order of priority are:

### Access to affordable rehearsal space

- Prefer wooden sprung floor with no carpet
- Better access to community centres that charge no rental fee
- Schools are usually not an option as the custodian must be paid for by the group
- Dimensions of space should be large enough to accommodate size of group
- Some groups needed mirrors
- Some need a soundproof space
- Due to training and rehearsing schedules many groups need a central location accessible to public transit, that is not in a deserted area after dark.

### Better physical and technical attributes in performance venues

- dressing rooms close to stage (with mirrors preferred)
- large enough stage area to accommodate dancers/choreography
- sprung floor preferred (no carpet, not concrete)
- basic sound for live and/or recorded music
- basic lighting particularly for indoor venues
- some groups had special requirements particular to the dance form, e.g. the wooden floor for Spanish and Flamenco should have good acoustics to enhance the sound of the dancers' feet.
- many groups would like to achieve higher production values in performance.

All groups agreed that they make discretionary choices about where they will perform. Often it is more important to do the performance for a new audience than to insist that all physical and technical requirements are met.

These two areas represent the working conditions and safety of dancers. Several groups stated that they often rehearse or perform in conditions that increase the possibility of injuries as these are the only facilities they can afford.

### Training

This issue is more complex as there are specific training needs for different groups and many of the people interviewed are the main practitioners and trainers of their form in Metro.

- dancers must be trained for many years before they reach advanced level e.g. it takes approx. 8-10 years for one instructor to develop a high quality performance group.
- training at an advanced professional level is not available in Toronto (Polynesian, classical Spanish, Flamenco, Ukrainian, Historical Court Dance, to mention a few)
- training in these cases must be sought in the United States and/or in the country of origin of the specific dance form. This method of training is more affordable than bringing in international guest teachers. This outside training also keeps the trainers of local groups up to date with contemporary issues.
- Traditional and folkloric groups from Central and South America find that it is not always possible to know of local people who can train in specific dances from particular regions. Visitors are invited to teach these dances and sometimes people who have expertise on the history of the country are also invited to work with the groups.
- International Folk Dancing is being taught in Metro but is restricted to the forms known by local instructors which currently are primarily Eastern European and Israeli.

### Access to information about resources and funding

- This was the widest area of difference for the groups interviewed. Several groups were aware of dance service organizations and some had used these services. Others had heard of some of the organizations but knew little about their activities, while other groups did not know about these organizations at all.
- There was a parallel experience related to knowledge and application to funding bodies.
- Some of the groups participating exist on membership or fee payments to cover expenses and do not pursue funding.
- Several groups stated that they were interested in finding out about funding sources but were not sure how to find out what is available.
- Other groups had some experience with funding bodies and found that they did not meet the criteria or when they did that the application was very complicated and unclear. (Preparing advance budgets came up as did presenting a written description of dance performance).
- Those who had applied for grants felt that the work put into an application was a huge investment of time (their most valuable resource) for little or no return.
- Other groups felt that to access funding they are expected to conform to a way of operating their group that is not necessarily appropriate for what they want to achieve.
- A few groups had been successful at applying for funding but find it difficult to keep on top of the changing procedures and the work load involved as they are not able to pay for an administrative staff person.

### Other

- Most groups felt they needed to do more to promote themselves to presenters, audiences and to interest new participants.
- Proper promotion is not seen as possible without additional financial resources and is often inconsistent when done by volunteers.

## THE PARTICIPANTS

Afro Caribe Performers  
Jahanara Akhlaq  
Arte Flamenco Spanish Dance Company  
Afro Caribbean Dance  
Ballet Creole  
Nova Bhattacharya  
Canboulay Dance Theatre  
Caribbean Folk Performers  
Chi Ping Dance Group  
Collective Of Black Artists (COBA)  
Danse Baroque Toronto  
Joanna Das  
Esmeralda Enrique Spanish Dance Company  
Folklore Inka  
Grupo Azteca  
Aaloka Gupta  
Deepti Gupta  
Huairapungo  
Inside Out Productions  
Irish Dance Teachers Association of Canada  
Isintu Dance Theatre  
Kalinka Russian Dance Company  
Janak Khendry  
Shao-hui Kang  
Korean Dance Studies Society of Canada  
Li Ling Dance School  
Makpoloo Dance Initiative  
Rini Mohancy  
Ravi Mony  
Ontario Folk Dance Association  
Chitralka Patnaik  
Polynesian Music and Dance Association  
Alejandro Ronceria  
Royal Scottish Country Dance Society  
Sakurakai and Ayame-kai  
Sankofa Scarboro Caribbean Youth Ensemble  
Bindu Shah  
Rina Singha  
Menaka Thakkar  
Tolmec Dance Theatre  
Toronto Chinese Dance Academy  
Ukrainian Academy of Dance  
Yasmina Ramzy & Arabesque Dancers

# SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS FAIR PARTICIPANTS

## **Dance Ontario Association**

- *working towards the promotion and development of all forms of dance in Ontario*  
179 Richmond Street West,  
Toronto, Ontario M5V 1V3 Tel: (416) 204 1083 Fax: (416) 204 1085

## **CADA (Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists)**

- *committed to improving the social and financial status of professional dance artists*  
#210-680 Queen's Quay West  
Toronto, Ontario M5V 2Y9 Tel/Fax: (416) 260 1956

## **CAN:BAIA**

- *a multidisciplinary organization helping artists of African descent access opportunities, markets and funds*  
54 Wolseley St., Second Fl.  
Toronto, Ontario M5T 1A5 Tel: (416) 369 9040 Fax: (416) 947-0159

## **CAPDO (Canadian Association of Professional Dance Organizations)**

- *represents and serves the needs of professional dance organizations in Canada*  
3790 Farmview Rd., R.R. #1  
Kinburn, Ontario K0A 2H0 Tel: (613) 832-0397

## **Dance Umbrella of Ontario (DUO)**

- *providing subsidized administration, promotion and production support services to independent dance artists*  
490 Adelaide Street West, #201  
Toronto, Ontario M5V 1T2 Tel: (416) 360 6429 Fax: (416) 363-8702

## **Dancer Transition Centre**

- *offers financial, advisory and moral support in planning for your future*  
66 Gerrard Street East  
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1G3 Tel: (416) 595 5655 Fax: (416) 595-0009

## **Kala Nidhi Fine Arts of Canada Ltd**

- *promoting India's arts in Canada and facilitating intercultural dialogue*  
321 Sheppard Avenue East  
North York, Ontario M2N 3B2 Tel: (416) 224 0403 Fax: (416) 250 1871

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