

Review of Recent Approaches to Growing Dance Legacy

Summary prepared by Theresa Rowat
For the Canada Council for the Arts

October 2005

Legacy has emerged as an immediate concern for Canada's dance community. As the discipline has matured, it has taken to heart the past and the future, as well as the present. Dance practitioners and dance organizations have realized a cumulative body of work. Some have already faced profound transitions in which the very survival of their creative legacy has been at stake. Funders are recognizing organizational capacity and well-being as vital components for fostering sustainable creative excellence, and are looking at an integrated role for legacy and the responsibility for stewardship of accumulated artistic capital.

The interest in dance documentation and heritage preservation is growing as dance records are sought for the revival and reconstruction of works, for development and teaching methods that draw on studying past works, as well as for dance scholarship, literacy and promotion. Although the immediacy of creation and performance predominates, there is increasing historical awareness and recognition of the value of documentation and the archival record.

This report provides a summary review of efforts to address legacy issues over the past five years. These began with a focus on collections and dance heritage over six years ago, and have since grown to encompass a broad definition of legacy that is integrated with organizational health and related transition and succession issues.¹

Dance Heritage Initiatives 1999-2002

The impetus for studying the dance heritage and dance collections issues came from The Canada Council's Dance Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee had expressed concerns about legacy and documentation, and recommended that steps be taken to study the implications of these issues for the discipline. Major dance heritage initiatives had been launched in other countries, and questions were raised about the status of Canada's dance heritage, including what traces remained of Canadian dance history, best practices for managing preservation collections, and how to ensure long term documentation of current and future creation. In addition, The Canada Council had been receiving some funding applications that included documentation and collection cataloguing and preservation components.

In 1999, the Dance Section of The Canada Council, with the participation of the Department of Canadian Heritage (Arts and Heritage Sector), commissioned a study² to examine archival and resource materials created and collected by dance companies, organizations and institutions in Canada. The study was intended as a preliminary step in addressing documentation and preservation issues that were being faced within the dance community. It looked at the current status of dance collections in Canada, assessed needs, and provided links to collections management practices and services relevant to the creation and maintenance of dance collections. It included profiles of the resource collections and archives of a sampling of dance organizations, and some of these were adapted for inclusion on the Society of Canadian Dance Studies' website.

¹ Legacy, Transition, Succession: Supporting the Past and Future of Canada's Arts Organizations. A report for the Canada Council for the Arts by Roy MacSkimming with Francine d'Entremont, March 2005.

² Study of Dance Collections in Canada prepared for discussion at LOGIN: DANC/SE 2000 by Theresa Rowat, VARIA inc. through support from The Canada Council and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

More work is needed to create a more comprehensive set of profiles, and to update the information collected some years ago.

The study identified stakeholders, and was ultimately intended to serve as a basis for engaging heritage repositories and academic institutions in a dialogue on collaborative solutions. It also served a role within the dance community as a basis for discussion about whether documentation and preservation issues should be policy considerations in the discipline's own funding context, and it raised the responsibility of the dance community itself with respect to its own recordkeeping and legacy.

From archival and collections perspectives, there were several primary observations that emerged in the course of this study, and these continue today:

- recordkeeping and records management

The dance community has not recognized the professional practices of the collecting disciplines. There are very few examples of productive dialogue between dance organizations and the various information management and heritage professions. The result is unsystematic collections management at dance organizations that leads to a loss of valuable archival material. (There were three notable exceptions found in the selected set of organizations visited for this study: Danny Grossman, National Ballet of Canada Archives and École supérieure.)

- heritage repositories

Archives and other heritage repositories have not met the special needs of the dance discipline. There are a number of explanations: the absence of an "original record" in dance according to pure archival definitions; the presence of both archival records and artifacts/costumes that would require both archival practice and museum practice; the extensive presence of clippings and secondary source materials (not traditionally valued in the archival context); and the high proportion of audio-visual materials which are costly to manage, preserve and reformat. Government sponsored archives had experienced a long period of retrenchment, focusing on government records at the expense of private sector and non-traditional records such as dance.

- Dance Collection Danse

DCD has been maintaining a significant portion of Canada's dance heritage. However, it has been unable to establish its presence among the collecting institutions, and is largely excluded from those funding sources. Instead, its affiliation is with the dance discipline, and arts funding sources. Its existence has been due to the valiant efforts of its founders, Miriam Adams and the late Lawrence Adams, but that existence has been precarious and the collections are at risk.

From the site visits, interviews and research that were conducted during this initial study of dance collections, it was evident that Canada has a rich dance legacy that should be preserved, responsibly managed, and made accessible. The study pointed to the need for primary sources by historians and scholars, and revealed that the heritage infrastructure of museums, galleries, archives and libraries that is a vital part of the sustainability of other disciplines does not serve the dance discipline adequately for various systemic reasons. The dance legacy holdings that do exist are largely with the dance community — with individuals, with company archives, and with Dance Collection Danse.

Unlike other creative disciplines, dance has no tradition of strong links with heritage institutions such as authors with libraries, or artists with art museums. Until the past few years, there has been relatively little concern for documentation and recordkeeping among dancers and choreographers who, as performing artists, tend to work in the present. The result is that primary sources for dance studies are lacking, and it is difficult to reconstruct even the recent history of the dance discipline in Canada. Outside of the activities of Dance Collection Danse, and of a handful of university libraries supporting dance studies programs and public libraries with performing arts special collections, there has been little awareness of dance heritage beyond the dance community and little focus on building dance collections. Although dance is a vital part of Canadian culture, the traces needed to inscribe dance in curriculae, in the cultural canon and in cross-disciplinary histories are largely absent or unknown.

Login:danc/se 2000

From the study of collections and its archival heritage perspective, the focus moved to engaging the dance community and obtaining reactions from dance practitioners on their points of view. The *Login:danc/se* symposium was held in 2000 in conjunction with the Canada Dance Festival. Using *The Study of Dance Collections* report as a launching point, the symposium included a working session entitled *Building Dance Collections and Preserving the Legacy / L'Établissement de collections de danse et la préservation du patrimoine chorégraphique*. A round table of invited delegates was assembled, and an open invitation to Canada Dance Festival participants was extended to take part in the discussions.

At *Login : danc/se*, the dance community expressed its recognition of the dance heritage issue, and its desire to participate in preservation and advocacy initiatives. Participants also expanded the scope and understanding of dance heritage to include diverse dance practices, and the many types, contexts and perspectives that are a vital part of dance in Canada and Canadian dance abroad. Both delegates and audience members engaged in an animated discussion which concluded by reaffirming the importance of the dance legacy issues, identifying an extended list of stakeholders, suggesting additional issues that should be analysed in the context of dance heritage, and recommending that some concrete steps be taken to facilitate dance preservation both within the dance community and in the collecting community. The formation of a dance heritage working group or committee was proposed.

Committee for the Preservation of Canada's Dance Heritage

With funding support from The Canada Council, an ad hoc committee was formed to pursue the heritage issues raised at *Login danc/se* and to make recommendations on productive next steps. The committee members were Lawrence Adams, Miriam Adams, Amy Bowring, Theresa Rowat, Philip Szporer, Vincent Warren, and Leland Windreich.

The Committee was active between 2001 and 2002, and was established to move the dance heritage issue forward. It produced a dance legacy 'manifesto' and a dance heritage strategy for the community.

Dance legacy 'manifesto':

Your future is now.

Dance is an ephemeral art form presented in the moment. Looking ahead to how your work will survive is an act of self-respect and empowerment.

Everyone who has produced an artistic legacy — whether dancers (interpretive artists) or choreographers (creative artists) — deserves more than an ephemeral existence.

Allow your work to survive. You are the person who decides how...

- *Documenting, record keeping and creating an inventory of your work are the keys to giving your work and career a continuing life.*
- *Documentation can include videotapes, dance notation, photographs, administrative papers, and much more: all contribute to a comprehensive historical record of your life's work.*
- *Consider making an oral history to reflect the diversity of dance culture, the influences in your work, your creative process, and how you make dance or teach dance.*
- *Develop initiatives in dance/media (film, video, new technologies).*
- *Consider archiving your work. This will increase its future accessibility and help preserve your part in the history of dance.*

This process of documentation and preservation doesn't only serve dancers and choreographers, the entire community benefits when the performing arts of the moment become a lasting cultural legacy.

Dance Heritage Strategy for Canada – 2002

vision

The long term objective is ...to ensure the preservation of Canada's dance heritage, recognizing that legacy is vital to the future of a sustainable dance discipline.

strategic objective

The strategic objective for this five-year period beginning in 2002 is ... to lay the foundations for maintaining dance heritage in Canada.

strategic directions

A. BUILD A NETWORK

Identify a network for dance preservation across Canada by ...

- launching a dialogue on dance heritage needs among dance practitioners, collections custodians, and dance scholars

- identifying the essential components of dance documentation, including methods for documenting the choreographic work and the interpretation
- facilitating the self-identification of dance organizations that will maintain preservation capacity for their own archives
- promoting awareness of dance heritage needs among collecting institutions and professionals (archivists, librarians, curators, collections managers)
- ensuring diversity and geographic range in a dance preservation network, to reflect dance in Canadian society
- clarifying roles and mandates of Canadian dance heritage stakeholders, and ensuring that the dance community has a sustained voice in determining the future of its own legacy

B. PLAN NOW TO PROTECT FUTURE CREATION

Ensure documentation for future dance creation in Canada by ...

- promoting legacy awareness among dance practitioners
- integrating documentation and record keeping into dance project funding, through project criteria and policy initiatives
- building capacity for heritage preservation in the dance community by developing and maintaining self-help tools that can be used by practitioners and organizations
- undertaking development initiatives in dance/media and interdisciplinary activities (film, video, new technologies) that will result in effective documentation

C. PRESERVE PAST CREATION

Address the preservation management needs for Canadian dance heritage materials created before 1990 by ...

- identifying the key extant dance records that are essential to Canadian dance history and to dance scholarship and appreciation
- establishing special projects to find appropriate repositories for existing collections
- establishing a special program to kick-start the reformatting of dance records on obsolete and at-risk formats

On June 11, 2002 the Committee for the Preservation of Canada's Dance Heritage hosted a meeting to launch the Dance Heritage Strategy. This open meeting was held in conjunction with the Canada Dance Festival 2002, and in conjunction with the first conference of the Society for Canadian Dance Studies.

For the first time, the meeting brought together interested parties both from within the dance community and from other areas. This expanded discussion included members of the dance community, dance scholars, heritage collections custodians, and funding and federal program officials. It resulted in substantial steps in developing mutual understanding of dance heritage needs, existing gaps, and the recognition of responsibilities for documentation, identification, preservation, and access provision in dance heritage.

Using the Strategy as a framework for advancing dance heritage concerns, contacts with federal collecting institutions were made in 2002-2003 both to examine the extent of their dance holdings, and to explore the potential for increased response to dance heritage needs. However, minimal results were achieved and enduring bridges between the dance discipline and collecting institutions have yet to be realized with only a few exceptions.

Repositioning: from heritage to legacy

In 2004, The Canada Council commissioned a report as part of its organizational health initiative. The report covered dance, inter-arts, media arts, music, theatre, visual arts, and writing and publishing. "Legacy, Transition, Succession: Supporting the past and future of Canada's arts organizations" was prepared by Roy MacSkimming with Francine d'Entremont in 2005. It made a number of recommendations that validated the importance of legacy in a holistic context of organizational well-being and sustainability.

For the purposes of the study, legacy was defined as follows:

"The legacy of an arts organization represents its accumulated artistic capital, derived from its artistic mission, vision and mandate. Artistic capital is realized over time through the whole of the organization's creation, production and/or dissemination activities. Legacy also embraces relationships built with the organization's various communities; its intellectual property; archives documenting its creative work; and facilities or equipment essential to fulfilling its mandate."

The report stated that "the need to define, preserve and build on the legacies of arts organizations is perceived as significant and increasingly pressing. This issue is driven by demographics and linked to questions of public investment and accountability, as well as to transition and succession within organizations".

During the past few years, the dance community has suffered the passing of dance artists with irreplaceable legacies. In addition to the collective emotional and cultural sense of loss, there have been practical and logistical repercussions that will have an enduring impact on the survival of their artistic and organizational legacies.

As the dance community's discussions of heritage and legacy evolve and take account of these experiences, they invoke a much broader set of planning implications, and they

foreground the need for the involvement of legal advice in intellectual property and succession, archival collections management advice, and comprehensive approaches to the administration of organizations that go far beyond creative and artistic activity.

Another significant development that relates to dance legacy in Canada should also be noted here. The founding of the Society of Canadian Dance Studies, and the organization's activities that include symposia and publications featuring historical research, have foregrounded the long term archival use of legacy materials. This extends beyond the immediate relationship to the creator and organizational well being, and forcefully demonstrates that our dance heritage is a cultural asset for generations of scholars, critics and historians to come.