

PERFORMANCE MATTERS IN COMMUNITY DANCE

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Throughout my life as a dancer, I have always felt that performing in front of an audience was a transcendent experience; one filled with a unique sense of community I have not encountered in any other activity in my life. The connection among the dancers during a show was palpable. Whether it was the pre-performance huddle onstage before the curtain went up; the squeeze of a hand before an entrance; an exchange of smiles center-stage while crossing paths with another dancer; or the high-fives after the curtain went down; there was always an acknowledgement that we were all “in this together,” that there was a special relationship between all of us as we shared in this endeavor that was bigger than any one individual’s personal agenda. Most people go through their entire lives without experiencing the act of dancing in a group in the heightened state of performance.

This paper explores several questions: “Is there a way for this activity to be part of more people’s lives?” “Do so-called ‘community dance projects’ create this same sense of community experienced by professional dancers?” “Why would an audience want to see a bunch of untrained dancers?” “Would adding expert choreography and more of a focus on the quality of a final performance improve the sense of community for audience and performers alike?” These questions led me to investigate the ways that non-professional dancers could experience a sense of community through dance

performance, which in turn steered me to an examination of community dance projects. So what exactly are community dance projects? Community dance projects are an opportunity for non-professional dancers (sometimes joined by professional dancers) of any class, age, ability, gender, sexuality or race to come together as part of a common dance experience (usually culminating in a performance), with attention to the process of the project itself and to fostering a feeling of unity, communion, and collectivity.¹

Having seen hundreds of professional dance performances over the years, I had a strong bias toward watching rigorously trained dancers. How many other audience members would have that same bias? Are community dance performances benefiting the participants, at the cost of subjecting audience members to “bad art?” I was worried that this would be the case, but I was surprised to learn through my research that community dance performances do benefit the audience and community at large, as well as the participants, by communicating social issues, historical issues, and ideas of community.

Since the performance itself seems to offer so many benefits, it is surprising that many dance scholars writing about community dance projects suggest that the process is more important than the product (performance), although many community dance projects do in fact culminate in a performance (Wilson, 2008, p. 64–65). While I absolutely agree that the process is extremely important, my own investigation of community dance projects led to the discovery that the performative aspect of the projects played a key role in helping to foster the sense of community among, and the

¹ I have formulated this definition based on ideas gleaned from:

Amans, D., Ed. (2008). *An introduction to community dance practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kuppers, P. (2007). *Community performance: an introduction*. New York: Routledge.

empowerment of, the participants. This paper follows my journey of discovering the value of the performance itself for participants and audience members of community dance projects.

Methodology & Background

My research consisted of an investigation of several community dance projects directed by established American modern dance choreographers: Liz Lerman, Tamar Rogoff, and Pat Graney. Liz Lerman's *Hallelujah* was a series of projects which engaged one thousand participants from fifteen communities across the United States (Borstel, 2012). I specifically investigated the *Hallelujah* project entitled *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found* that took place in Ann Arbor, Michigan (2001). Tamar Rogoff's *Ivye Project* (1994) explored the pre-WWII history of Jewish citizens of the town of Ivye, Belarus (Korey, 2007, p. 26–32). Pat Graney's *Keeping the Faith's* (ongoing since 1995) participants are inmates in a women's prison and her *Chair Spectacle* (2012) brought together Seattle citizens of all ages, mostly untrained dancers, for a celebration commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle.

I chose to investigate community dance projects that were choreographed by established choreographers and that included some professional performers, as well as the untrained dancers, in the performances for a few reasons. First, there seemed to be a divide in the dance world between community dance and professional dance and I wanted to explore the gray area between the two. As someone coming from the professional dance world with a burgeoning interest in community dance, this avenue appealed to me—I wanted to see how these two worlds could be bridged. Second, I discovered that there is a fear among some community dance practitioners that “by

using a separate term for community dance, the community dance movement risk[s] being marginalised as a second rate appendage to Professional Dance” (Houston, 2008, p.11). I wondered if crossover between the two fields would solve that problem.

I was curious to explore whether or not a community dance project that incorporated elements from both community and professional dance—specifically the emphasis on both the process and the performance as product—still built a sense of community among the participants and empowered them the same way as when the emphasis was not on the performance. I also hoped to determine how the performance benefitted the audience.

I obtained my data in various ways. Some of my research was gathered through first-hand experiences. I was fortunate to be able to attend rehearsals, the dress rehearsal, and the performance of *The Chair Spectacle*. I sent a questionnaire to its participants and personally interviewed participants, audience members, and Pat Graney, its choreographer and also the director of *Keeping the Faith*. In addition to my personal experiences, I used primary and secondary source materials to research *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found*, *The Ivey Project*, and *Keeping the Faith* (beyond what I learned from Graney herself). I watched videos, read interviews with the choreographers, analyzed participant and audience reflections (from *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found*), and reviewed the literature concerning each project and community dance projects in general.

Effects of Performance on Participants

My own findings concerning the effects of performance on the participants of community dance projects were corroborated by community dance practitioner and

scholar Heidi Wilson's examination of community dance performance in "Community Dance in Performance." She argues that community and self-esteem (which I consider a component of empowerment) are built through the act of performing (Wilson, 67–68, 2008). I identified these two elements in all of the projects I investigated. I found that community building and empowerment were certainly an integral part of the process itself in all of the projects, but they were enhanced by the performing experience.

The participants in Pat Graney's *Chair Spectacle* seemed to have felt the same sense of community that I had experienced while performing as a professional dancer. During the performance, which took place around the huge outdoor fountain at the Seattle Center, where the 1962 World's Fair had taken place, all eighty-eight participants had to synchronize their movements so that they were in unison for most of the thirty minute-long dance. Because the music was not counted and there were very few musical cues, the performers had to coordinate their movements on and around their chairs by "tuning in" to the performers around them. The movements themselves were fairly simple, but the sequence was complicated and required extreme concentration.

One participant addressed the idea of connection with the other performers and of shared experience when I asked him whether he felt a sense of community while participating in *The Chair Spectacle*.

I did feel a sense of community because we were all there to accomplish the same thing. When I felt the most communal sense was actually in the performance and the runnings [run-throughs] of it. And it wasn't just that we were all doing it at the same time—it was that we were actively doing something

together and we were actively maintaining the same shapes and gestures in the same time frame and it wasn't the specific movement that I felt there, but the intent and the effort to make that happen and that's where I felt the community.

This participant indicates that the participants' communal sense of purpose and the focus and attention required to move with other people in unison in front of an audience created a sense of community and connection. Another participant of *The Chair Spectacle* makes a similar suggestion.

This was different precisely because it wasn't a class and it wasn't a recital. It was a coming together to dance and to celebrate our ability to move together and create something larger than ourselves.

This participant felt that the act of moving together was the larger goal, not the demonstration of acquired dance skills as is customary in a dance class or recital.

Because I am focusing mostly on the performance experience itself, I will not include much discussion of the creative process. I do think it is important to note, however, that in addition to the heightened sense of community experienced during the performance, there is community that is built among the participants during the process as well. But even the community building that occurs during the process is due in large part to the awareness of the impending performance. The collective goal of creating a well-received performance results in increased bonding, commitment, and trust.

The performance not only builds community, but it also empowers the participants—giving them a voice and allowing them to accomplish something they didn't think they could do. It is often after the final performances that the participants feel a huge sense of accomplishment. Graney describes this experience,

Some people feel that they can't learn a dance. Some people panic. And then they go through it. . . . And at the end, the mentors step away and you have the finished experience of the people performing. They own that experience. That's the transition that creates this amazing kind of work. . . . That's to me the highest form of community work—to enable people to own their own experience. . . . When it's done, they have this completion and this pride in what they are doing. . . . It is a transformative experience whether it is in *The Chair Spectacle* or whether it is in the prison [*Keeping the Faith*]. . . . The performance is probably like going through a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. You memorize something. You stand up in front of people. You do your talent show. You get through it somehow. You are studying something that you feel is outside yourself and then you become the master. (personal communication, June 29, 2012)

This statement reveals Graney's strong belief in the role of the performance in empowering the participants.

Most, if not all, of the inmates who participate in Graney's prison community dance project, *Keeping the Faith*, have never performed, but at the culmination of the project, they are asked to perform for an audience of not only their peers, but also the general public. Many of these inmates have never felt proud of something that they have accomplished or had anyone witness their success. The experience of being witnessed for something accomplished is critical for them (Graney, personal communication, June 29, 2012).

Being witnessed is important for the inmates so that they can demonstrate what they have accomplished, but also because they are witnessed being vulnerable, honest,

and human. During the performance, they share their personal stories, emotions, struggles, and dreams that they have written about during the writing workshop that is part of the project's process. It is empowering for the inmates to feel that someone is listening to them—they are given a voice. The empowerment, the social connections, the self-awareness, and the creativity that is fostered by *Keeping the Faith* clearly benefits the participants as evidenced by the fact that recidivism rates among them are roughly eighty percent lower than those of the general Washington Corrections Center Women population. (Berson, 2008, p.83)

Empowerment of the participants in Graney's other project, *The Chair Spectacle*, occurred simply through its inclusion of non-professional dancers—enabling them to be a part of something from which they would normally be excluded. Almost all of the participants commented on this aspect of their experience. One participant remarked,

I am hungry for more. I would love for there to be more opportunities to dance as a non-professional. I spent time in Central and South America as a child and dance in those cultures was always viewed as a community activity. It did not belong to one age group or only to those who were professional. It saddens me that our culture has so few opportunities to come together and dance. This was special and I'm so glad to have been a part of it.

This participant has taken dance classes on and off throughout her life, but this statement is a plea for more opportunities for community dance *performance*, not just classes at a dance studio.

Being given the opportunity to perform onstage came up again and again in interviews with participants of all the projects. One of the performers of *In Praise of*

Paradise Lost and Found, Agnes Zwarka, a member of the Hannan House Senior Program, exclaims, “I’ve always wanted to dance on stage, so I got my chance” (Forte Media Productions, 2005).

Offering non-professionals the opportunity to perform not only benefits the participants, but the audience as well. One participant argues this point,

I really value inclusivity—all different capabilities and ages. . . . I think all people dance, but now we just have it for the experts. So anything like this is really important for people to see that all bodies dance. We are built to dance.

The audience learns that we all can dance, even if we do not think of ourselves as dancers. Her argument was validated by statements made by audience members of Liz Lerman’s *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found*. After watching this performance that included performers of all ages and abilities, one audience member commented, “I had previously experienced modern dance as something predominantly performed by the chronologically young (under 30). It opened a new window. . . . [A]ctive and expressive movement should have no specific age limit.” Another exclaimed, “I loved the fight against ageism through these movements across generations. This added an incredible dimension—I’d love to see more of this and do more of this myself.” Allowing people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to perform is empowering for the performers and opens the eyes of audience members to new possibilities, adding to their notion of who should be dancing.

Although performing is empowering for participants, it also requires some degree of relinquishment of individual needs for the greater good of the piece itself and an awareness of the entire group. In writing about this issue in reference to Lerman’s *In*

Praise of Paradise Lost and Found, John Borstel (2005), Humanities Director for Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, proclaims,

“[D]istinctly civic values prevail: Where regardless of whose voices are ultimately reflected, everyone is invested in the outcome; where participants are willing to empower someone else to speak for them; where each person in the project is willing to share a stage with someone whose viewpoint may be different from their own; where individuals are willing to sacrifice their own movement, story or moment in the spotlight to endorse the collective voice of the piece.” (p. 30)

In community dance performance, the collective vision and purpose supersedes the individual ego. Contributions made from individual participants during the creative process are valued and might be incorporated into the piece, but in the final performance, not everyone’s voice can be heard throughout. There is a sharing of the stage with the rest of the group and an overarching artistic vision that must be fulfilled.

Artistic and Aesthetic Concerns

This idea of artistic vision leads me to a debated issue within the field of community dance. Community dance scholar and practitioner Petra Kuppers (2007) asserts,

Community performances are **communally created** [bold in original]. They are not individually authored: the end product, if it comes into existence, is not predetermined by an artist who directs people towards this goal. Instead, the outcome is (relatively) open, maybe within a thematic field opened up by the facilitator, but full of spaces and times for people to create their own expressive

material. With this approach, community performances challenge conventional performance aesthetics. (p. 3–4)

Kuppers believes that community performances are those communally created by the participants and guided by a facilitator, who allows the participants to generate the content for the final performance. The community projects that I investigated were on a continuum as far as the involvement of the participants in the creation of material for the final product, but in all of them, the facilitators, who were established choreographers, had the final say in the artistic and aesthetic shape of the performance. The choreographers may not have had a clear idea of what the final product would be before beginning the process and before receiving inspiration from the community members, but in the end, they determined what the audience would see in the performance. The participants did not make the final decisions about what content was included in the final product or what that product would be. Perhaps because of this fact, Kuppers would choose not to label the projects that I investigated as community dance projects at all, as they do not fit her definition. But I believe, and I think the choreographers would agree, that their community dance projects could still be labeled as such.

In her statement above, Kuppers also proclaims that community dance performances “challenge conventional performance aesthetics.” I think she means that community dance projects cannot be viewed with the same criteria as professional dance. She brings up an interesting point that relates to my initial concern about the audience’s appreciation of community dance projects. Maybe Kuppers provides the solution to my problem of viewing non-professional dancing. Maybe non-professional dancers need to be viewed through a different lens than professionals.

The shaping of the final artistic product occurred toward the end of the creative process in all the projects I investigated. Early in the process of *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found* and *Keeping the Faith*, Lerman and Graney both engaged with the participants in the creation of movement material through a round-robin exercise where participants created pedestrian movements and gestures inspired by certain themes, ideas, or stories. After movement material was created and the performance drew near, the process became less democratic and the choreographers and their professional collaborators took a stronger autocratic role (Borstel, 2005, p. 30). This is the point at which the choreographers' editing of the content that had been contributed by the participants occurred.

Rogoff had a different process, but controlled the final product in the same way. She involved the citizens of the town of Iyve, including five Jewish Holocaust survivors, in her *Iyve Project* in many ways: as producers, cooks, translators, and performers. Many of these people had stories to tell and wanted to contribute content for the performance, but many of these contributions did not fit into Rogoff's vision. She wanted to tell the story of the Jewish Iyve citizens, but didn't want the piece to focus on the Holocaust the entire time. She was afraid that some of the contributions of the community members would create a different tone than the one she had intended. Rogoff describes this complication during the creation of the piece,

The feeling of shared ownership resulted in many locals bringing me stories to include. But because I was mindful of the Holocaust as a subtext within my piece and, as the director, had decided to choose only images that did not invoke guilt or violence, I had to find a diplomatic way to deal with these offerings. I ended up

publishing whatever people brought me—poetry, stories, drawings—which I gave out after the performance so it didn't influence the viewing of the work. All in all, when you work in community, there's an acquiescing you have to do to your constituencies. You must have their permission to be there, to tell their stories.”

(Korey, 2007, p. 28)

Rogoff found that she had to acknowledge the contributions of the community, but she was able to negotiate the situation in such a way that it did not interfere with her artistic vision by including the contributions, but keeping them separate from the core of the performance.

In her exploration of Graney's *Keeping the Faith*, dance scholar Jessica Berson discusses Graney's insistence on quality control for the performance. Graney feels that it is possible to create a community dance project that is not only a rewarding process, but also a successful artistic product. Graney and the other creators of *Keeping the Faith* label themselves primarily as “artists,” not educators. This identification with being an artist shapes the entire experience, so it is not just about the process, but the product as well (Berson, 2008, p. 90–91). In describing her reaction to the performance, Berson (2008) states,

I expected to be emotionally moved but was surprised by how aesthetically rich the piece was for me; and its emotional impact was deepened because of its artistic integrity. I believe that there is a correlation between the quality of art making and the efficacy of the educational and/or therapeutic process in community-based arts programs. Recognition of this link, on the part of artists,

educators, therapists, and funding agencies, might facilitate the development of both aspects of such projects.” (p. 90–91)

Berson suggests that attention to the quality of the art created during the process will lead to a more positive effect in the end for the participants and the audience.

She gives further support for the integrity of the *Keeping the Faith* performance when she declares,

The performance of *Keeping the Faith* is compelling to viewers both because of its artistic merit and the performers’ commitment to their work and the absolute attention and support that they offer each other.” (2008, p. 92)

Not only did Berson find the performance to have artistic merit, but so did Matt Richter, one of Seattle’s toughest dance critics. He describes it as “hands-down the most powerful performance I see all year.” (Berson, 2008, p. 80)

This successful artistic product is a result of Graney’s artistic vision, which was evident in her *Chair Spectacle* as well. A particularly visually arresting moment was the very beginning, when the performers, age three to seventy-five, all dressed in white, walked single file, holding their white chairs, forming a spiral as they descended the sloping walls surrounding the fountain. Graney describes this moment and her aesthetic preferences,

For me, I am a formalist. And so I am really interested in shape and design and architecture and I always have been. When you see the spiral of people going down the fountain [where the performance took place] it is awe-inspiring. It is beautiful. It is the chambered nautilus. It is the Fibonacci sequence. And that is part of my aesthetic as an artist and that will always be part of how I choreograph

for a group. It doesn't mean that that is the most important thing, but that is an element. And people are drawn in by that. For me, the object is to create an experience, but to experience something beautiful that people want to see.

(personal communication, June 29, 2012)

Graney clearly intends for her work to have artistic and aesthetic value.

Lerman, too, is concerned with the aesthetic and artistic integrity of her performance. In reference to the *Hallelujah* project in Houston, Lerman states, "The challenge for Saturday [opening night] is that it can't only be for the participants. It also has to be for the audience" (Glentzer, 2001). Lerman is affirming a common concern for all of the choreographers of the projects I examined, which is that the project's goal is not only to serve the participants, but the audience as well.

Effects of Performance on the Audience

If community dance projects culminate in a performance in front of a public audience, then it only seems right that the performance should benefit the audience in some way. I discovered that community dance performances impact the audience and community at large in many ways, including communicating social, political, and/or historical issues, and ideas of community.

In "Community Dance and Performance," Heidi Wilson examines the impact of a performance of one particular community dance project involving children. Her research focuses on what the audience valued in the performance. The audience was comprised almost entirely (ninety-four percent) of people that were close friends or relatives of one of the performers. She found that 72.4% of the audience evaluated the performance as 'excellent,' 26% 'good,' and 1.4% 'fair.' None considered the performance 'poor' or 'very

poor.’ When asked what they valued about the evening’s performance, audience members’ responses fit into six categories: “artistic considerations; seeing the enjoyment of the performers; the diversity of people performing; perceived effort demonstrated and achievement and experience gained; community considerations; and entertainment value (Wilson, 2008, p. 71).”

While Wilson’s findings are certainly important for the field, I wondered what the effects of community dance performances were on audience members who did not have a close connection with a performer. The projects that I had chosen to investigate were high-profile projects choreographed by high-profile choreographers, so the performances were presented for the general public, and not just close friends or family of the performers.

The first way that I found that community dance projects benefit the audience concerns social issues. The performances often bridge different social groups and raise awareness of social or political issues. *Keeping the Faith* bridges the distance between prison and public populations (Berson, 2008, p. 80). The project brings the general public into the prison to watch the final performance, allowing the inmates to have a sense that they have something worth contributing to the outside world and giving the audience members the opportunity to enter into the inmates’ world (Graney, personal communication, June 29, 2012). One of Graney’s goals is:

to interface with what we consider the other. To interface with a population that is segregated, hated, feared. People say, ‘I can’t believe how thin the line is between us and them,’ and that’s why we bring people into the prison to interact

in that community, which is very different from going to a theatre. You're in their community, you get to see what their rules are. (Berson, 2008, p. 83)

It appears that Graney hopes that the project's public audiences will acknowledge the inmates' humanity and empathize with these marginalized individuals by entering their realm and coming to a realization of their circumstances. These hopes were realized, as evidenced by the audience's responses to one of the performances. One audience member commented, "Through art, spoken word, and dance, I was able to look past your exterior and see through to your soul" (Berson, 2008, p. 89). Another stated, "The power of the program seemed to overcome this fear, horror, negativity, differences, inside/outside clashing ideas—I was continuously and repeatedly brought to tears by each individual baring their selves before us. We are not so different" (Berson, 2008, 90). Both of these audience members' stereotypes and preconceived notions were challenged, and compassion and understanding were furthered. The goal of bridging across barriers and bringing very different groups together was accomplished.

Bridging groups is not only an important element in community dance projects, but also in building social capital and civic dialogue. Political scientist Robert Putnam discusses the benefits of bridging and its importance in supporting democracy in our nation in his books *Bowling Alone* and *Better Together* (Putnam, 2000, 2003). Bridging benefits the participants, audience, and also, the community at large.

Rogoff's *Ivye Project* bridged groups and broke stereotypes as well. Some of the audience members came to the small town of Ivye, Belarus from very far away (Moscow, Lithuania, Estonia, and other parts of Belarus) on buses provided by the

production. Dinner was provided for them before they returned home. Rogoff explains the bridging nature of the project and its ability to break down barriers,

The experience for the audience expanded beyond just being an audience to meeting people and crossing boundaries and borders. . . . Lithuanian actors and audience didn't want to come to Belarus at first because it was perceived as backwards. Yet many did come and were really impressed. So the performances helped break that stereotype. (Korey, 2007, p. 29)

Because of the performance, many people who would have never traveled to Ilye learned about the town and their pre-conceived notions about it and its inhabitants were transformed.

Lerman's *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found* bridged groups in Ann Arbor (often perceived as a privileged college town) and Detroit (often perceived as a poor, working-class city). Crossing the physical and perceptual boundaries between the two cities became a motif—bridging the dualities of “privilege and poverty, academic and industrial economies, ivory-tower isolation and urban blight” (Borstel, 2005, p. 21).

There was another dichotomy that was addressed, which was between Lerman's tradition of post-modern dance and the religious fervor of her collaborator, choir director, Rudy Hawkins, his singers, and the liturgical dancers that were part of the community performers from Detroit. The final performance reflected the exchange of ideas that occurred between the more religiously oriented and more secularly oriented participants during the course of the creative process. In the production, there were two sets of performers representing Adam and Eve, two singers and two dancers, and the audience traveled on a journey with them as they were thrown from Paradise. This journey

weaved in and out of ideas from the Bible and more secular interpretations of the idea of paradise.

The theme of Paradise Lost originated in Lerman's research about Paradise Valley, an African American neighborhood and entertainment district that was demolished in the 1960s by the construction of Highway 75 (Borstel, 2005, p. 21). When deciding on what neighborhood would be demolished and which residents would have to be relocated so that a highway could be built to connect the wealthy rich whites living in the suburbs to the city, it was this African American neighborhood with little political power that was chosen. Through watching the performance, audience members learned the history of this place, which had been a cultural mecca for African American entertainers during the jazz age, and also learned of the racial injustice that had occurred in the destruction of this neighborhood—an important part of the history of Detroit.

Other issues that the performance addressed were feelings about the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which had taken place at the beginning of the creation process. Although it had not been part of the original plan, Lerman felt that it was impossible to ignore this significant event, so she included it in the final performance. She tied in the events of 9/11 into the performance by relating it to the concept of paradise and the fact that this tragic event threw our country out of its perceived paradise. Lerman invited community religious leaders from various faiths to tell stories inspired by 9/11 as part of the performance. This inclusion kept the performance relevant to current social issues that were affecting the audience at the time.

Connecting to social issues and to a city's history gives the audience members that live in that community a deeper connection to, and understanding of, the place where they live. Identification with where one lives is often an important bonding element in communities. Learning about a community's history can make outsiders more empathic toward members of that community, as was demonstrated by Rogoff's *Ivye Project*.

Rogoff's intent was to raise awareness of the Jewish people that had once lived in Ivye that were killed during the Holocaust and buried at a mass gravesite in the forest outside of town. Most of the citizens of the town, and certainly people living outside of it, knew nothing about the history of the Jewish people that had once lived there or the terrible massacre that had occurred. The performances raised awareness of the history of the gravesite (where the performance took place) and the Jewish community that had lived in Ivye. The audience learned about Jewish culture as the performers re-enacted their daily life: they sang traditional Jewish songs, danced, rehearsed a play, went to school, played cards, and engaged in religious rituals. During the performance, the audience members followed the path that Ivye's Jewish citizens had taken as they walked from town into the forest where the Nazis killed them. The performance culminated at their mass gravesite (Rogoff and Wright, 2001).

Rogoff explains the impact of the performance, "Now, because of the performance, many more people know about the site, which gives it status and creates a kind of protection for it. After I left, the children made birdhouses to put all around—a sign that it continued to be a place (Korey, 2007, p. 32)." Rogoff hoped that the awareness raised by the performance would insure that the gravesite would no longer

be susceptible to vandalism and that its significance to the community would be increased.

The Chair Spectacle also communicated the history of a place to its audience as part of a celebration to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. By using Seattle community members as performers, many of whom had attended the 1962 World's Fair as children, the performance connected the history of the city to the people who live there today. The commemoration of the historical event provided the opportunity for Seattle citizens to bond in a communal celebration of their city and its history.

In addition to communicating social and historical issues, community dance performances also communicate the idea of community to their audiences. By seeing a group working together, exemplifying the idea of community in performance, the audience members can see the potential for community building in their own lives. I think there is a strong impact for the audience members when the performers are people with whom they can identify—untrained community members, not professional dancers.

Performances can also be used to demonstrate to the audience that belonging to a community, or feeling communion with others is a positive, rewarding experience—a feeling communicated successfully to the audience of *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found*. When asked what the performance was about,

many respondents named such values as unity, crossing boundaries, the power of the collective, celebrating difference and appreciating commonalities. . . .

People perceived the performance to be about a harmonious vision of community, reflecting diversity and difference. (Borstel, 2005, p. 26)

From the reaction of the audience, it is evident that the performance was successful in communicating the idea of community and also bringing up questions of how the audience members themselves could foster community in their own lives. The following are a list of responses from audience members when asked what questions the performance left them with: “How do we manifest the spirit of peace to everyone? It only takes a spark to get the fire going. We need so much more of this.” “It left the question of why all people of every nation cannot come together as we did tonight.” “Will the sense of community that was generated tonight continue?” “Can and will this interaction continue? Can we spread the concept?” (Borstel, personal communication, July 31, 2012). These questions reveal that the audience members were looking beyond the performance to how the concept of communion promoted by the performance could be fostered in their own communities.

The fact that the idea of community was communicated to an audience was also evident after interviewing some of *The Chair Spectacle* audience members. One stated, I don't think the point of this is necessarily to put on a polished dance. It is to have a group of people come together almost like a community ritual where you are all doing the same thing and it's an act of shared experience that then they are sharing with us.

The shared experience of the performers was shared with the audience, not just making the audience witnesses, but also making them part of the shared experience of the performance, and therefore, part of the extended community.

The idea of extending the community to include the audience was upheld by German choreographer Rudolf von Laban in his work with movement choirs in the early part of the twentieth century. When Rudolf von Laban first started working with his movement choirs of amateur dancers, he felt that they did not need an audience. He believed that the goal was to create community within the group of dancers itself and everyone should participate. However, over time, he changed his mind because he saw the merit of communicating the values of community to an audience. He wanted to spread his ideas of harmony and community to as many people as possible. For him, even if people were not participating in the dance itself, just by witnessing the dance, they would still absorb his message (Counsell, 2004, p. 154–167).

This concern for the audience was present in all the projects I examined. They embraced the audience as part of the community created by the performance in ways that were different from that of traditional professional concert dance. *Keeping the Faith* brought the audience into the prison itself. In the *Ivye Project*, Rogoff costumed the audience in capes as they travelled through the woods—taking a more active role than if they had been sitting in seats inside a theater. The spectators of *The Chair Spectacle* were seated or standing very close to the performers and some were actually situated within the performing space itself. There was an entire section of *In Praise of Paradise Lost and Found* that included audience participation. Lerman taught the audience members a series of gestures that they practiced and then performed standing in their seats with music. Later in the performance, the performers danced that exact same sequence of movements on stage. The audience reflections at the end of the performance revealed that this inclusion of the audience into the community of

performers was greatly appreciated by many audience members (Borstel, personal communication, July 31, 2012).

Through all of these examples, it appears that the audience members benefit from community dance performances through their communication of social, political, or historical issues, and ideas of community. The fact that most of the dancers in the performance are untrained does not preclude a valuable experience for the audience.

Conclusion

It is without question that the process of community dance projects is a central concern, but my research suggests that the product should also be considered. Through my research, I discovered how important the element of performance was to the participants and the choreographers facilitating the projects. The performance allowed for a heightened sense of community and empowerment for the participants, an opportunity for choreographers to make artistic statements, and audience members to benefit from the communication of social issues, historical issues, and ideas of community.

Crossover projects are great opportunities to bridge the distance between professional dance and community dance. Community dance projects that are facilitated by established professional choreographers often have outcomes deemed to have artistic and aesthetic merit by audience members, scholars, and critics. Some would say, and I agree, that the facilitator's attention to the artistic and aesthetic impact of the performance on the audience would increase the chance that the audience would benefit from the performance.

I am not saying that community dance projects should only be facilitated by established choreographers. I am only suggesting that the projects that I investigated that were directed by professional choreographers benefitted the constituents in many ways. I would like to propose that more professional choreographers consider becoming involved in community dance. As the world of professional dance struggles to prove its relevance to society and to gain funding from government and private organizations, it should consider crossing over into the realm of community dance, which is regarded favorably by funding bodies and communities for its ability to connect people from all walks of life to each other and to art, to build community, and to empower marginalized groups. Community dance projects provide great opportunities for professional choreographers and their companies to engage with their communities and I hope that the results of my research would encourage them to do so.

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