

Joint Committee on Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Wednesday 16 October 2019 at 1.30 p.m.

Committee Room 4, LH2000, Leinster House

The importance of Dance as a performance art and related matters

Invited witness: Davide Terlingo | Head of Circus, Dance, Street Arts and Spectacle

The Arts Council | An Chomhairle Ealaíon

Opening Statement

The definition of dance extends beyond the genres and areas of practice that we support through the funding programmes offered by the Arts Council. These activities are usually led by professional artists or professional organisations - although to a high degree they involve the presence of a general audience (for instance in dance shows) or direct people's participation (such as in dance classes, local festivals, community projects, etc.).

These activities are those that are more commonly referred to in national policy papers: we talk about artistic production, touring, dance centres and services, youth practice, community projects. We also talk about contemporary dance, classical ballet, Irish dance, hip-hop, modern dance, among others. In themselves all these terms represent a very vast and deep reaching field of practice.

However, when talking about dance it is essential to consider an even deeper meaning. It is that represented by dance as a primordial manifestation of the human spirit, it is that of embodied emotions and social interactions, it is the way in which human beings have celebrated across world cultures and throughout history. In practical terms, I refer to simple things: people dancing in a club, or a wedding. I refer to spontaneous street dance, or perhaps someone dancing in a bedroom. A couple dancing a waltz, or friends dancing a ceili.

Once we consider this broad definition of dance, we can more comprehensively discuss its importance as an art form. This is a vast topic, but I would like to propose a chosen narrative based on the importance of dance for 'the individual' and the importance of dance from a social perspective. Although the two are related.

Importance for the individual

Leaving aside less tangible considerations, the importance of dance for the individual is often associated to different forms of psychological or physiological benefits. Although I am not a medical expert, as an ex-professional dancer I can testify to the value of body awareness. Many medical conditions are the result of skeletal misalignments, poor physical posture and general disregard of the signs that our bodies constantly send us. Besides the most obvious benefits associated to a physically active life-style, dance is a powerful tool for acquiring body awareness. While true in general, this aspect is particularly emphasised in contemporary dance, and its well-established association to certified disciplines such as Body-Mind Centering, Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, Somatic Studies, Pilates, etc. (Also Yoga, Tai-Chi, etc.).

I can also provide some anecdotal evidence of the psychological benefits in terms of building confidence, expressing personal emotions, mediating the interaction with others. These elements are particularly important for the development of young people, but they are relevant to all. In my professional career I have come across specific studies on these topic, however due to its importance, it is best investigated with professional qualified in these fields.

Importance for society

Dance is a shared identity that unites specific communities. Each type of step is a symbol that carries meaning. It is a way to express a particular shared identity and world view. This can be said for the aesthetics of ballet, as for the types of step dancing related to different communities in Ireland. As mentioned by Catherine Foley in her book 'Step Dancing in Ireland', dance can express, shape and embody different notions of cultural identity: self, affinity groups, regional, national, global or imagined.

The importance of dance can also be discussed in the context of critical discourse and international exchange. As dance is part of a world-wide heritage, its practice allows people and artists living in Ireland to be part of this global community. One that is founded on beauty and ideas, rather than blind profit and division.

To conclude I would like share some facts relative to Arts Council investments in Dance:

In 2019 on an annual budget of circa **€3.3 million**, the Arts Council supported 11 strategically funded organisations (i.e. organisations of core national importance):

- 5 production companies (one ballet and four contemporary)
- 1 international dance festival
- 4 organisations provide resources and services to the public
- 1 developmental organisation with focus on youth practice

Crucially, this year we have also pre-committed over **half a million Euro** through the Arts Grant Funding scheme, in 2020 this will support a further:

- 3 production companies
- 3 independent dance artists
- 1 resource organisation

Over the past year there have been many great outcomes for independent dance artists sector. These have been realised with the assistance of programmes offered to artists across a number of dance genres and in all parts of the country, including:

- Project Awards,
- regional dance residencies
- Bursary Awards
- Travel and Training Awards
- A partnership initiative for young emerging dance artists called **Step Up**

In addition to the funds that are directly allocated from the dance budget, there are other Arts Council schemes that supported dance activities in 2019, such as:

- Touring and Dissemination of Work:
- The Festival Investment Scheme

There are also dance activities that were supported in 2019 through the **Traditional Arts and Young People Children and Education, Arts Participation, Festivals** and **Arts Venues** budgets of the Arts Council.

Appendix

2019 Arts Council Dance Budget

ALLOCATION BY PROGRAMME	Amount (€)
Strategic Funding	
Strategic Funding	1,743,307
Strategic Funding MAF	665,640
Strategic Funding Touring	132,000
Project & Programme	
Arts Grants Funding	326,480
Projects	246,700
Artist's Support	
Bursaries	63,060
Dance Artist in Residence Scheme	110,470
Travel & Training	15,500
Grand Total	3,306,157

NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS RECEIVED	2019
Multi-Annual Funding	2
Strategic Funding	9
Arts Grant Funding	10
Bursary Award	21
Dance Artist Residency Scheme	11
Festivals Investment Scheme	3
Markievicz Award	3
Next Generation Artist Award	4
Open Call	7
Project Award	18
Touring	5
Travel and Training	28
Total applications received	121