

## **Robert Connor & Loretta Yurick, Artistic Directors Dance Theatre of Ireland**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. We speak as full time professional dancers, choreographers, teachers and Artistic Directors of both *Dublin Contemporary Dance Theatre* and *Dance Theatre of Ireland* over the past 30years. We are very grateful to have been able to create, perform and teach throughout Ireland, Europe, USA and Korea.

We are co-founders and former officers of *Dance Ireland*, which was set up to represent the needs of professional dancers & Choreographers. We are also co-founders of the Dublin Youth Dance company as well as the Dance Theatre of Ireland *Center for Dance* in Dun Laoghaire --one of the first purpose-built Centres for dance opened by President McAleese (where today over 2000 members of the public dance recreationally, all ages 3-93)

We are founders of one of Ireland's largest educational Outreach programs in Dance, introducing over 80,000 adults and young people to modern dance and, most recently, over the last 5 years, we are co-founders of the *Well-Dance For Senior* programme and currently Finalists for the 2019 *National Lottery Good Causes award*. So this is our background.

We'd like to speak about 2 things today: 1) The needs of professional dance-and what can be better here, and 2) the importance of Dance for health and well being. Dance has a huge contribution to make to culture, community and people.

We are passionate about dance, obviously--though it is not a profession for the weak of heart. The Training is many years and costly, the hours are very long, the work is demanding and highly competitive, the pay terrible, contracts are short term. There is little security. But dance is one of THE most powerful and vibrant art forms—it can move us in a way nothing else can and help us remember things we need to remember---Dance matters because through dance we understand how WE matter.

So in professional dance the positives are: Currently there is some funding for independent projects, there is some funding for resource organizations; there is some money for dance production company's to create on a project basis, (and all of these are under-funded) But what's MISSING in this landscape is this: There is not enough money for dance companies to offer dancers sustained work on an on going basis. *AND why does this matter?* The biggest problem facing dance is sustainability.

For dance artists it means they are not able to work consistently. Funding on a project-to-project basis provides valuable seed money but what's needed is sufficient funding for a number of production company's to employ dancers for longer contracts--that is an investment in the growth and development of artists and of dance.

Also, to be a choreographer--to make work--you must also be a producer, recruiter, administrator, grant writer, fund raiser, Gig-booker, find & hire the dancers, navigate the tax system or find an administrator (also willing to work short-term, for not very much money) find the composer, lighting designer, costume and graphic designer and everything else. So in short, choreographers do all that at night and are in the studio during the day. Dancers and choreographers –whether small or large--need more money for full time administrative resources.

The other issue which we want to tell you about is that dance is poised to make a huge contribution toward social, physical and mental well being for all.

What would you say if you were offered a prescription that would make you feel less pain, improve your balance, make it easier to meet people, feel less stiff / **feel younger**, more fluid, think clearer, breathe deeper, sleep better, reach higher, smile more and be more confident -- with no side affects?

Well that's what dance can do...!! We have developed a programme that can be delivered by professional dance artists that makes people feel good in themselves and its good for them. It's called **Well Dance for Seniors, one of our outreach programs**, a modern dance and music programme - designed and developed specifically for older adults, people with Parkinson's and people with Dementia. It addresses balance, fitness, mobility, cognitive functioning, memory, recall, and MORE IMPORTANTLY it takes people into their own well of creativity.

### **So WHY DANCE? Why now?**

Ireland's population is shifting to one which has a much higher proportion of older people – doubling by 2031. There is a tsunami of age-related illness coming - Dementia, falls, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, and recent studies indicate 28% of all seniors are either clinically depressed or borderline – and of those almost 50% have a very low rate of engagement -their world has shrunk. We are living longer, the challenge is to live better.

**And there is a social and economic imperative to find solutions. We annually spend €1.69billion on dementia care. A Canadian study has said if people increase their physical activity, it can offset a dementia diagnosis by 2 years which is €3.4 billion of expenses.**

Dance is now being recognised in international research (including our own 2-year study done by the head of *Trinity College OT*) as **THE MOST effective activity for offsetting and delaying many age-related illnesses** *People who dance frequently are 76% less likely to develop dementia.\** Dance also *"reduces Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, depression and "benefits reaction times and cognitive performance".\*\**

So we need more funding for Dance and Health and more sustained, (2-3 yr funding—including full-time admin) for more Dance production Company's.

However, we are falling short: the 2020 allocation of just over €80 million to the Arts

Council still leaves the Arts Council at *less than 2008 recession level funding* & Dance is a very much smaller part of that.

Dance is one of the greatest celebrations of the human spirit. It has existed since the beginning of time as ritual, recreation and spectacle. As a Theatre Art it communicates with a directness unlike anything else. It is worthy of increased funding and recognition.

*\*the Bronx Longitudinal Aging Study, New England Journal of Medicine 2014*

*\*\* BUPA Study "Shall we Dance?" 2011*