

“There are problems with this model,” Garner continues, pointing to issues around audience objectivity, artistic development and chronically unpaid dancers.

And no artist or arts organization in the U.S. is impervious to the relentless bottom line.

Across the country, dance faces steep challenges. In recent years, major dance companies, from San Jose to Houston, New York City to Cleveland, have collapsed. Theaters and studios big and small have shut their doors. Even national treasures, like Dance Theatre of Harlem, who *should* be supported in perpetuity, have fallen victim to insurmountable debt, forcing the company and its seminal repertoire to disappear for nearly a decade.

In an austere America, where a down economy has crushed endowments and tightened belts for benefactors and ticket buyers alike, where the Johnson-era agencies that used to send funding down to artists have dried to a trickle, and where the arts are barely, if ever, taught in schools, artists and presenters have been forced to economize:

“Dance tends to be the most expensive to present and most difficult to sell,” says the Hult Center’s Sharkey.

But education and outreach play a role. In Portland, for example, White Bird Dance sprinkles its season with some well-known titans, but they’ve also spent the past two decades engaging local audiences with a wide range of dance from every corner of the globe.

And every visiting company connects with the community somehow, offering classes and workshops in the schools, teacher-trainings and special events that are free and accessible to participants. White Bird is a small organization with a full-time staff of just five, but they’re pretty clever: This past spring at Cirque Alfonse, a wonderful Québécois modern dance/logging company (you kinda had to be there), the team had promoted the performance to Portland’s passionate Timbers fans, *et voila*: A huge, rowdy, enthusiastic audience for dance appears!

Another institutionalized innovation that White Bird fosters is their NEST program, or No Empty Seats Today, that allows patrons to make a tax-deductible contribution by donating tickets through White Bird to one of its 20 partnering local human service organizations. Through NEST, people who may never have had the opportunity to see a live arts performance have access to world-renowned contemporary dance companies, and as an added bonus, the house is full, night after night.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

To survive in 21st-century America, dance-makers must possess the acumen and fortitude to constantly grease both artistic and managerial tracks, which raises a series of questions about the future of dance in Eugene.

Could anything help to alleviate this burden? Perhaps there’s potential for more business sponsorships and corporate support?

Could the Arts and Business Alliance of Eugene invest in emerging and mid-career artists in contemporary dance? Are there other community stakeholders who could serve as liaison between the dance and business world?

Could choreographers learn about how to apply for the foundational and governmental support that does exist? Or are there nice lawyers and accountants that could volunteer to help them with their paperwork?

Could the city open the doors to the Hult’s beautiful studio as an affordable, incubating rehearsal and performance space for dance? It has a sprung wood floor — and was likely designed for just this purpose.

Are there other spaces in town that might trade rehearsal and performance time in-kind?

Moving forward, the best hope might be the Lane Arts Council, already a strong partner to dance and dance education. The organization offers workshops for artists and arts organizations in marketing, audience building and business development training. They also provide fiscal sponsorship to emerging arts organizations, send dance educators into local schools, allocate the city’s Community Arts Grants as well as engaging in partnerships to create informal dance performance opportunities throughout the season.

And on the horizon, there’s this exciting possibility: “Lane Arts Council is working with several dance organizations to create the Innovation Hub in the old Lane Community College Downtown Campus,” Sponko of the Lane Arts Council says. “This Hub will include an open space in which various dance groups could rehearse and perform to an intimate audience.”

The space is just in its visioning infancy, so it’s hard to say how it will actually be utilized and whether dance will be a priority. Still, it’s exciting to imagine, even if the timeline, from idea to open doors, might be glacial to artists hungry for a new home.

Could a cash infusion speed things along?

Could we potentially create new public funding streams to support artists and the infrastructure necessary to support them?

In 2012, Portland voters passed a \$35 per person income tax for city residents, the Arts Education and Access Fund. In 2014 the fund garnered \$8 million for the arts and education, much of which was funneled to the Regional Arts and Culture Council and its collaborative partner, the Right Brain Initiative. (The city of Portland essentially gave over the majority of its arts management to these nonprofits that were already doing a bang-up job of it.)

For more than 10 years, a Cleveland cigarette tax has raised more than \$15 million in arts funding for the region each year.

And in 2008, Minnesota arts advocates banded together with sportsmen and environmental activists to run a campaign that resulted in the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, which amended the state constitution to provide a dedicated sales tax to protect clean water, wildlife habitats, arts and culture, and parks and trails. In 2012, the tax generated \$52.6 million for the arts.

Maybe it’s not just about capital, but cooperation.

Could the Eugene dance community come together to sponsor a tour or to host a dance series similar to the Oregon Bach Festival? Granted, that organization has a

long and illustrious history, but what about a community-wide effort on a smaller scale? Oregon Contemporary Theatre has its NW10 curated playwriting series. What about something like that, but for dance?

Eugene’s challenge isn’t isolated, but its solution could be unique: How about a 1 percent charge on every ticket to a local sporting event that goes towards dance? (Because I have a sneaking suspicion that the reason sports are so fun to watch is that they are dance-like. There, I said it.)

THE NEXT GENERATION

Dance is fragile. And for most, dance-making is a volunteer gig.

Although small statewide pockets of cash (\$1,000-5,000) are available to successful grant applicants, these limited funds are almost uniformly project-based, and most require 501(c) (3) nonprofit status to apply. Although some grantors are loosening restrictions, on a statewide level, many funders won’t look at requests from organizations with an operating budget of less than \$100,000.

Locally, designated funds that are not open for application provide some ongoing support to specific programs, including EBC and maintaining and improving the Hult Center itself. The largest local competitive grant, the Hult endowment, according to its guidelines provided by the Oregon Community Foundation, funds organizations “that represent traditional art forms,” with a minimum expense budget of \$200,000 per year. (To an emerging choreographer who is sweating to come up with \$15-\$25 per hour for studio time, that figure likely sounds like a Mars landing.)

But a healthy arts community needs both small and large organizations. It’s not a competition for audience dollars; it’s about introducing audiences to a wider way of seeing.

That’s why an infusion of meaningful new work from around the country and around the world is so important. It initiates. It inspires.

And who knows how to quantify the potential ramifications of that?

In my 20-plus years writing about dance, I’ve had the opportunity to interview many arts-makers, some really big names in the world of theater and dance. And a favorite question to ask is: “What was your earliest inspiration?”

Invariably, superstars in their fields can remember the moment, as a child, when something amazing came through town and they had the chance to see it.

As we embark on the performance year, I’ll enjoy the many and varied offerings the Eugene dance scene has to offer. I’ll donate to my favorite dance organizations and do my best to advocate for dance of all kinds.

I’ll look forward to my trips to Portland, Seattle, San Francisco and NYC to see national and international dance.

And I’ll cherish my memory of seeing dancer David Parsons, seemingly frozen in mid-air, on the Hult Center’s Silva stage. ■

Home of
KING'S CREW

Home of
EVOLVE

Unity

School of Dance

"Instilling Creativity, Confidence and Artistic Expression!"

Ballet • Jazz • Acro • Hip Hop • Jazz Funk
Lyrical • Technique • Tricks • Breakdancing

Classes begin
Sept. 12th

For All
Skill Levels
& Ages!

Visit Our Website for Fall Schedule

www.UnitySchoolofDance.com

For more information, call 541-954-5740

543 W Centennial Blvd • Springfield (In the Centennial Shopping Center)

PAPA'S

SOUL FOOD KITCHEN

LUNCH	Tues-Fri
DINNER	12-2 & 5-10pm
CATERING	Sat 2-10pm

VOTED BEST OF EUGENE 2006-2015 9 STRAIGHT YEARS

WANTS YO' BIG ASS TO EAT SOUL FOOD



400 BLAIR BLVD. 342-7500