

Moving Bristol

A Manifesto for Dance in the City



*Pic: Protein Dance (in)visible Dancing, Dance Village at BHF, July 2016.
Photo Mark Simmons.*

Introduction

This short document is written in response to a stakeholder meeting convened by Theatre Bristol and partners that brought together dance artists, organisations, venues, producers, funders and programmers. The session threw up questions from the sector around what dance needs, and how they can best help support art form development in and around Bristol.

This manifesto is by no means comprehensive and is not a strategy, but aims to help answer those questions and suggest some simple solutions for how we might work better together for dance and by extension, culture, place making and health and well being in the city.

Vision

Bristol is a city that loves to dance. We are home to an active body of individual artists, practitioners and companies with specialisms including community engagement, dance and film, dance and visual art, movement direction, celebratory dance, youth dance, dance and older people, movement therapy and touring performance.

We work in schools, in universities, in arts centres, in theatres, in galleries, in the street, in-situ, in reclaimed disused spaces, on film, in our kitchens. We work across disciplines and with artists from other fields. We work with creative people who don't call themselves artists. We host a plethora of dance genres including folk and social styles such as Morris, traditional African and Irish dance and have a national reputation for strengths in contemporary performance and hip hop styles.

By making transparent what we each can do with and for each other, we hope that a more connected sector can flourish and find partnerships that nurture and celebrate what dance brings to the city.

In our minds eyes is a city where dance is valued and integral to Bristol's cultural calendar. A city where opportunities and pathways are visible and inclusive, feeding the rhythm of our shared ecology and sustaining momentum. A city that celebrates our distinctly diverse range of practice of performance, connecting the dots between socially engaged practice, talent development and performance.

Venues

As guardians of stage, space and audiences, venues can collaborate with dance to mutual benefit. Dance artists and companies deliver ongoing activities, classes and projects that can act as capillaries to dance audiences and participants.

Venues could consider building their relationships with dancers and dance makers by:

- Offering reduced cost rehearsal and class space to local artists.
- Offering residency opportunities and/or associate artist programmes, which could be designed to fit wider priorities as well as art form development.

- Offering mentoring or buddying in associated skills such as business planning, development and marketing.
- Marketing exchange arrangements with artists/producers.
- Offering class with visiting companies.
- Offering time with lighting technician to explore production design in R&D.
- Providing storage for company costumes and set.

Education

Schools, FE & HE are where we find and make tomorrow's dancers. Dance in schools can also impact on pupils' overall learning by re-energising and improving ability to concentrate. We can work with you in the following ways:

- Schools can access their £9000 Sports and PE premium to support dance projects and activities.
- As well as direct input into dance and sports curriculums, dance can animate curriculum subjects such as maths, geography, visual art and science. This particularly supports students with kinetic learning styles and ESL.
- Dance can be a non-competitive way to deliver health and wellbeing targets in schools. This works particularly well when delivered in tandem with wider school culture initiatives.
- Schools can support individual artists to access DBS clearance, which can be challenging for artists who are not members of a professional association that provides member services.
- Professional performing and choreographing artists are well placed to assist with delivery of the GCSE, AS/A level Choreography unit.

Dance in the Public Realm

We are a city that does public art well and when large scale dance-based public art projects have been delivered, they have been hugely popular. Dance offers unique opportunities for diverse communities to come together to perform or watch. It can be woven into and around the fabric of our city's architecture, its people and its history. It offers a visual and kinetic connection to its environment. It can be interactive or engage from a distance, abstract or entertaining, community-owned and celebratory, or art form pioneering.

Dance can animate places and engage the public through work in and with:

- New buildings, launches and openings as a way of embedding sense of ownership and celebration.
- Regeneration and unused buildings to breathe new life into underused landmarks.
- Libraries and museums as a way of encouraging deeper engagement with exhibitions or building architecture and uses.
- Outdoor festivals & gallery spaces.
- Public health messages and campaign awareness.

Public Health

As a form of cultural expression dance is uniquely placed to achieve health and well-being outcomes. It combines physical activity, social interaction, creative and emotional expression. Dance can improve cardiovascular health and prevent/reduce obesity; improve balance, resilience and mobility in older people whilst also being effective for improving self confidence and reducing health inequalities. Dance is most effective at delivering public health outcomes with the following support:

- Support in connecting with NHS & GP commissioning and client groups.
- Access to rigorous evaluation and evidencing support.
- Access to peer support /supervision systems for regular freelancers delivering on-going client based work.
- Structure for shared learning from best practice.

Our request

Inherent within each of these areas is the need for time to allow activities to embed and develop. Where greater financial investment may not be possible, the positive outcomes will take longer to manifest. Dance has cut a choppy historical course through our city's channels and we ask for time to effect a steadying hand, so that profile and relationships can build and take root.

Thank you!

Katy Noakes & Laila Diallo