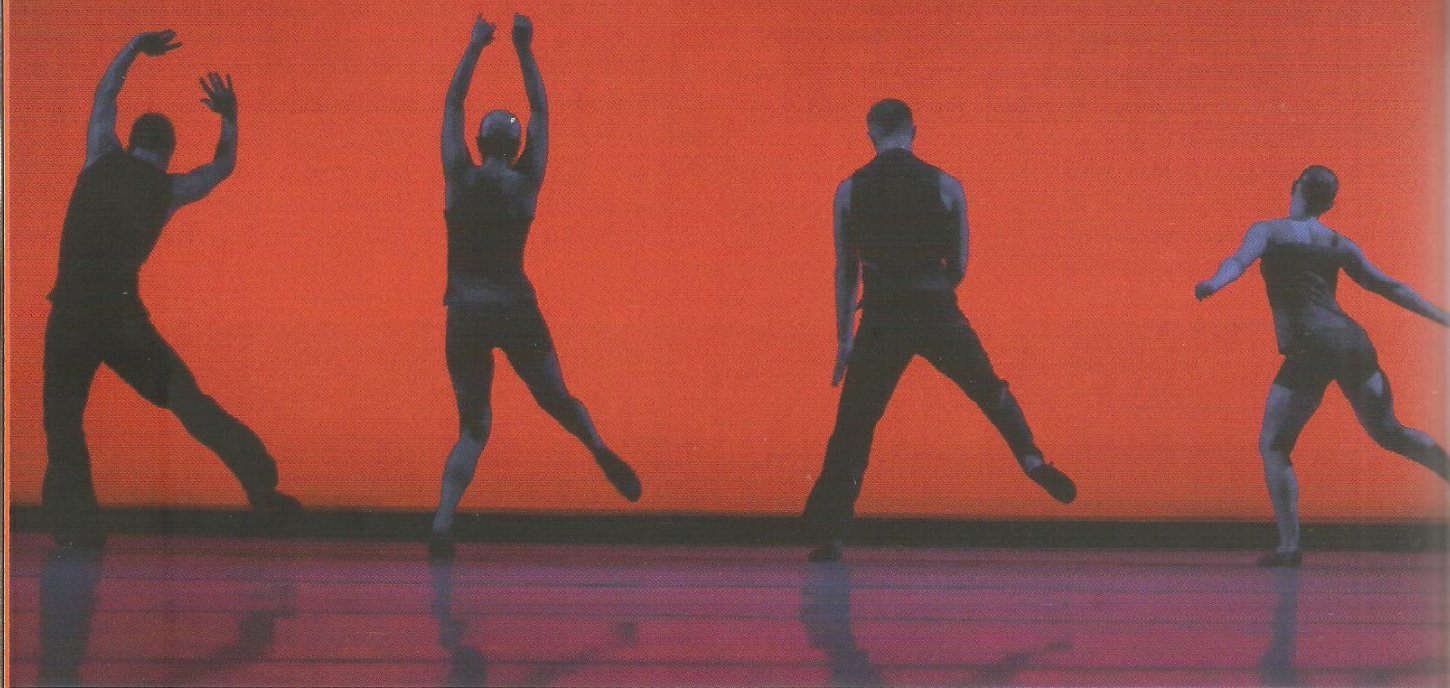


The Philanthropy Dance

By Jasmine Rios



Pyrokinesis 2 © Cheryl Mann Photography 2009

A majority of dance companies are well-versed in the philanthropy dance - a metaphor of sorts, describing the pursuit toward educational outreach grant support. Often challenging, the footwork in this tap dance is a major production. Each step is pivotal to the next - it must capture, impress, and sustain the interest of a highly selective philanthropic audience.

In Act I, both artists and dance company administrators are in the spotlight - ensuring program concept/choreography is unique and seamlessly executed. Act II is a rather slow dance - the lengthy period which dance companies await their story's conclusion - either a happy ending/grant acquisition, or a not so happy ending/decline letter.

In-school performances and free/discounted theatre performances are common educational outreach programs.

They are excellent vehicles for making live performance more accessible and represent the cornerstone of most organizations' outreach. Often though, performance-based programs are the extent of some dance company outreach repertoires. To this end, dance organizations yet to embrace that funding toward these programs is diminishing, is cause for concern.

One official, director Craig Watson of the California Arts Council in Sacramento, offers some valuable insight: „Many grant programs emphasize funding to help those in the greatest need in our society, but there are much deeper issues at play that involve the entire educational sector that needs to be examined here.”

He continues, “There’s been a gradual move away from the performance model for performing arts; more toward active participation for the students. Our own

Artists in Schools program at the Arts Council requires professional artists to work with students on an ongoing level.”

Sharing his expertise, Dance USA director Lane Harwell of New York says, “The future of dance requires a fluid approach to dance education. New programs that serve unique constituencies or clearly meet alternative educational goals can create new ways for expanding the reach and impact of dance and attracting new support. Dance makers should think big and out of the box as they develop educational programs.”

A select few dance companies in Seattle, WA; Denver, CO; and Dayton, OH have created unique outreach programs that target specific populations such as incarcerated teens, children with multiple physical disabilities, women recovering from breast cancer, homeless citizens, and geographically isolated/financially