



Dance Touring Initiative

A program of South Arts

Executive Summary

June 2009 - June 2012

Written by Rosemary W. Johnson

Designed by Alexandra R. Siclait

The South Arts Dance Touring Initiative (DTI) provides dance presenters a galvanizing, transformative process that creates a dynamic impact on artists, audiences and communities. By establishing a network and learning community among dance presenters who interact with artists and managers/agents in new ways, the Dance Touring Initiative provides a new paradigm for dance touring and presenting by:

- Building the expertise of dance presenters who understand the process, develop the necessary tools, and take the responsibility to see and learn about the work;
- Fostering trust and transparency within the presenter network to reach consensus on curating artists, coordinating block tour schedules, and using new fee negotiation methods so that presenters can effectively harness the “buying power” of the network;

Year One: 2009 - 2010

Lessons Learned

The Dance Touring Initiative (DTI) began with this question posed by South Arts: "How can we support modern and contemporary dance presenting in the South by nurturing and strengthening dance presenters?"

Year Two: 2010 - 2011

Lessons Learned

The presenters learned that continuing direct communication with the artistic directors and/or company managers throughout the life of the project was critical to overall project successes.

Year Three: 2011 - 2012

Lessons Learned

DTI's holistic approach (providing resources, professional development, seeing the work, fostering a learning community or network) is the reason for the program's success.

"The Consultant Team's approach incorporated a global perspective."

- Building relationships between presenters and artists through direct interaction and pretour planning visits that engage artists with the community to create and plan more effective residencies;
- Developing deeper relationships with dance agents and managers that emphasize their role as resources about the art of dance;
- Seeking ways to extend the dance network's values and presenting model to include other presenters and other arts disciplines;
- Creating common evaluation survey tools to uniformly collect information and determine the community impact of the Dance Touring Initiative.

Dynamic Impact.

South Arts' goals for this initiative are to: (1) assist presenters in their ability to more effectively present dance by promoting greater understanding and audience engagement, (2) move presenters from sporadic to regular dance presenting, and (3) create a strong network of dance presenters. The three-year cycle included two tours, with each organization receiving tour support from South Arts to present one dance company per season. South Arts selected a Consultant Team to facilitate this effort and develop an appropriate professional development curriculum. The Consultant Team's approach incorporated a global perspective by including the experiences and knowledge of the artist agent/manager, the choreographer/artistic director, and the dance presenter/service provider.

Professional Development.

The professional development component of the Dance Touring Initiative focused on learning about the art form, building a learning

“Presenters, agents and artists sought new ways of doing business together.”



Photo Credits

Lula Washington Dance Theatre
(pictured top)

Doug Varone and Dancers

Alex Springer (pictured middle)

Doug Varone (pictured bottom)

Photos by Yi-Chun Wu

community among the participants, and creating a process for working together as a dance presenter network. Face-to-face convenings played a critical part in all three areas. Six convenings over three years took place at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (2009), American Dance Festival (2010), the Performing Arts Exchange (2009, 2010 and 2011), and a final convening in Atlanta, Georgia (2012). Key professional development outcomes include:

- Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival was an immersion experience that provided all the necessary ingredients for the successful launch of the Dance Touring Initiative. The intent was to begin with the art form and the priorities were to see and talk about the work. Jacob's Pillow provided the perfect retreat or “summer camp” setting for this experience.
- The presenters defined the success of this immersion experience as building a network, finding commonality within the group, creating a learning community, starting with the art form, creating dialogue with the artists, and developing a broader understanding apart from the booking marketplace.
- There was a definite impact felt throughout the 2009 Performing Arts Exchange (PAE) and subsequent PAE conferences as a result of the Dance Touring Initiative. The DTI presenters “shopping” as a group gave excitement and energy to the Marketplace. The presenters coalesced as a network and took ownership of their work together. There was now a comfort level and trust among the group members to make decisions together about creating block tours.
- Not having a pre-defined process for developing a new model for booking and presenting dance was both a strength and a challenge. Presenters, agents and artists sought new ways of doing business together, and the

process of how to get there was left open to exploration. Some were more comfortable with this organic process than others, but the result was clearly a deeper level of communication.

- The professional development component at the American Dance Festival in 2010 evolved into less structured, didactic sessions and became interactive conversations of the learning community in which all parties expressed ideas and offered constructive comments and suggestions. The presenters were becoming more discerning in their viewing of dance because of their DTI experiences and were looking for more specific responses to the artists' performances in terms of their curatorial vision for how a particular artist can meet their community needs.

- During the 2010 Performing Arts Exchange, the presenters developed a "Statement of Values" as a communication tool with agents and other presenters about how the DTI model is changing the presenting field. The values emphasize three things: creating a learning community of dance presenters, building community with dance artists, and developing a new approach to dance touring.

- Key factors in building a successful dance presenter network include the immersion experience of seeing live dance together and talking about those experiences, informal and formal face-to-face group interaction experiences, and learning about and from each other's work as presenters.



David Dorfman Dance

Photo by Adam Campos

Year One Lessons Learned: 2009 – 2010.

The Dance Touring Initiative began with this question posed by South Arts: "How can we support modern and contemporary dance presenting in the South by nurturing and strengthening dance presenters?" During the first year, this question was answered by

developing a new model for a dance presenter network that could serve as a learning community in order to solve issues surrounding the presenting of modern and contemporary dance. Chief accomplishments included establishing the dance presenter learning community network, booking the first tour, and conducting the planning visits with each dance company's artistic director to develop community residencies. Important lessons learned include:

“The presenters were becoming more discerning in their viewing of dance because of their DTI experiences.”

- Direct interaction with the artist and the advance planning visit were transformative experiences that provided the best residency-planning scenario. It was recognized that this was a luxury provided through DTI funding, and South Arts subsequently initiated a presenter assistance grant category to fund advance planning visits by artistic directors in South Arts' nine-state region.
- Having “buy-in” about the DTI concepts and values from the presenter, agent and artist provided the best block-booking experience.
- Diversity among the presenters with regard to experience, size, resources, and venues should be addressed sooner in the network-building process.
- South Arts staff and the Consultant Team recognized that DTI is navigating a space between the individual person who is the “presenter” and their institution as the “presenter.” How will knowledge/skills learned through DTI be shared within each institution? How can South Arts facilitate that process?

Year Two Lessons Learned: 2010 – 2011.

For the 2010 – 2011 season, the presenters selected Doug Varone and Dancers or Dayton Contemporary Dance Company to provide multi-day residencies and public performances in their communities. The following qualitative outcomes or “lessons learned” are summarized from the presenters’ narrative project descriptions:



EVIDENCE

Shalya Alayre
Photo by Julieta Cervantes

- The advance planning visits by the artistic directors played a major role in residency successes. Several presenters reported that specific residency activities were developed during the planning visit that would otherwise not have happened through traditional booking processes with agents. In addition, the advance visits were crucial to avoiding major production issues that would have occurred because of the diversity of venue sizes and technical capabilities.
- Continuing direct communication with the artistic directors and/or company managers throughout the life of the project was critical to overall project successes.
- Presenters were able to deepen existing partnerships and create new partnerships in their communities through the DTI residencies. Partner involvement in the advance visits created buy-in from the beginning, and many remained actively involved throughout the life of the project.
- University presenters successfully used the DTI residencies to deepen the university’s community relationships and to build relationships on campus. In particular, several presenters worked with their respective dance departments to provide a deeper experience for dance students by having work set on students by a company member prior to or as a part of the residency experience.
- The role of the tour “wrangler” or coordinator proved to be effective as a professional development tool for the

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presenters as well as providing an additional opportunity to foster the learning community environment of the DTI presenter network. Neither South Arts staff nor the Consultant Team presented a “how-to-do-it manual” for developing the tours and residencies. Instead, the presenters determined their own courses of action throughout the process, with some guidance from the Consultant Team or South Arts as needed.

- Several presenters commented on successfully drawing new dance audiences to the performances because of the involvement of local dancers and musicians in the performance.

Several challenges became apparent and most were successfully addressed during the development and execution of the first DTI Tours:

- The agents' flexibility in adapting their respective “booking styles” to the goals of the Dance Touring Initiative was a factor that either complicated or simplified how the two tours developed. The traditional “a-la-carte menu” approach to residency planning was in direct opposition to the creative, organic process fostered by the artistic directors and presenters during the advance visits. A related challenge was finalizing contract negotiations before the advance visits were completed or before all technical issues were known.
- Specific to one particular tour, several presenters commented on the unforeseen lighting expenses, which was due to incomplete technical riders at the time of booking because the work was in progress. This was noted as a learning experience related to presenting new work, which was valued overall by the presenter network.
- Specific to one tour, several presenters commented on numerous difficulties associated with presenting one repertory piece that incorporated community dancers and musicians. Challenges included the difficulty of recruiting choir members,

the company's time management of rehearsals with the community dancers and musicians, and the advance coordination between the company and the local music directors.

- Unforeseen scheduling conflicts with either university or community events had an adverse impact on concert attendance for several presenters. The competing events were scheduled after the DTI Tour dates were finalized.
- New dance audiences unfamiliar with concert dance "etiquette" were sometimes disruptive during the performances.
- Some presenters noted the difficulty in engaging local dance studios in the project because of the fragmented and often competitive nature of this community.
- The involvement and support of local school officials proved critical to planning and executing successful in-school residency activities.

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Year Three Lessons Learned: 2011 – 2012.

For the 2011 – 2012 tour, the presenters selected either Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion, Ronald K. Brown's EVIDENCE, David Dorfman Dance, or Lula Washington Dance Theatre. The following qualitative outcomes or "lessons learned" are summarized from the presenters' narrative project descriptions:

- Presenters utilized experiences from the first DTI tour to maximize the advance visit planning sessions, deepen community partnerships, develop new partnerships, strengthen campus relationships, explore new marketing strategies, and seek additional funding support.

- Technical issues, unanticipated costs, and poor communications between venue, agent, and/or company personnel were the most common challenges.

- Partnerships were another source of difficulty, such as partners not following through or withdrawing from the project, lacking commitment, or not communicating clearly.

- Several presenters continued to create deeper experiences for dance departments at colleges and universities by having work set on students, or college dancers taking class and interacting with professional company members, giving students new perspectives about careers as a professional dancer.

- Planning visits and direct interactions between the artistic directors and community partners resulted in residency activities that would not have been envisioned otherwise. The advance visit continued to be recognized as one of the most valuable DTI components.

- Consistent communication and transparency are needed among the presenter, artist and agent throughout the duration of the project. The “smoothest” projects took place when both agent and artist understood and embraced DTI's goals and expectations.

- The Dance Touring Initiative's holistic approach (providing resources, professional development, seeing the work, fostering a learning community or network) is the reason for the program's success.

- The DTI learning community is now a network of presenters who have developed a level of trust in working together, are interested in each other's work, want to collaborate with each



Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion

Photo by Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion



other to book artists other than dance, and are drawing on the experiences of their colleagues to share knowledge.

- DTI has fundamentally changed the presenters' approach to presenting in all disciplines. Presenters have moved from "one-nighters" to focusing on residencies that provide more meaningful interactions with the artist to achieve the presenter's goals for building community and educating audiences.



Dayton Contemporary Dance Company

Photo by Dayton Contemporary Dance Company

Final Conclusions.

The Dance Touring Initiative is a successful, new model for presenting modern and contemporary dance because of:

- The focus on professional development in conjunction with seeing and talking about the work;
- The financial support for professional development, the face-to-face convenings, the advance planning visits, and block-book touring;
- The advance planning visits, which empower presenters to engage the artists with their communities in planning residencies; and
- The network of presenters committed to working together with a level of trust and transparency that permits overcoming most challenges.

This type of network and residency model is not for every presenter or artist and can be time consuming and expensive. However, the rewards are unlike any other for experiencing the arts in deeper, more meaningful ways. It is a residency model that can be used selectively by presenters who are working to build community, provide an introduction to an unfamiliar art form, or deepen the experiences for veteran audiences. It is a model that is easily adaptable to other genres.

“The DTI learning community is now a network of presenters who have developed a level of trust in working together.”

The full report has chronicled over three years how the DTI model:

- Develops transparency and a peer learning community within a presenter network;
- Changes the conversations and relationships among presenters, agents, and artists;
- Establishes the advance planning visit as the single-most effective tool for residency planning; and
- Deepens the understanding of an art form for the presenter and the community.

There are many challenges for this type of network that are made even more difficult because of the new economic climate and the field's current tendency to gravitate toward “safer” art for fear of losing ticket sales. They include:

- Sustaining the effort of building relationships in communities and with artists;
- Finding the financial, personnel, and time resources required for the advance visit and residency in addition to the performances;
- Building the case with boards and/or university administrations for using this residency/business model as opposed to or in addition to “butts in seats,” the “bottom line,” or “booking entertainment;”
- Finding the right curatorial balance between artists with name recognition or popular appeal and lesser-known, residency-oriented artists in order to take more risks; and

“It is a residency model that can be used selectively by presenters who are working to build community.”

- Developing audiences by inspiring their spirit of adventure and trust in the presenter to “stretch” beyond their comfort zone.

The first three-year cycle of the Dance Touring Initiative has come to a close, but the presenters are continuing to function as a network through conference calls and interactions with DTI Cohort 2 at the Performing Arts Exchange and other conferences. With the second three-year cycle underway, South Arts, the Consultant Team, and presenters in both cohorts are working together to develop an ongoing framework that will continue to develop and support dance in the South based on the DTI model.

2009 - 2012 Participants

Gene Conroy, Ballet Spartanburg
Michael Crane, East Carolina University
Brad Downall, Glema Mahr Center for the Arts
Eric Fliss, South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center
Angela Gallo, Coker College
Shannon Hooker / Shane Fernando, UNC Wilmington Presents
Charles “Buster” Irvin, Cumberland County Playhouse
Moirra Logan, University of Memphis
Bart Lovins, Hardin County Schools Performing Arts Center
Sharon Moore, North Carolina State University Center Stage
Dennis Sankovich, Mississippi State University Riley Center

Consultants

Rosemary W. Johnson, Alabama Dance Council
Ivan Sygoda, Pentacle
Stephen Wynne, TALK Dance Compay

Companies

David Dorfman Dance
Dayton Contemporary Dance Company
Doug Varone and Dancers
EVIDENCE, A Dance Company
Kyle Abraham | Abraham.In.Motion
Lula Washington Dance Theatre

Mentors

Elizabeth Auer, University of Florida Performing Arts
Tania Castroverde Moskalenko, Germantown Performing Arts Center
Bill Doolin, Florida Dance Association

Rebecca Jane Edwards, Cultural Development Foundation of Memphis
Leslie Gordon, Georgia State University Rialto Center for the Arts
Jenny Hamilton, New Orleans Ballet Association
Bridgette M. Kohnhorst, Vanderbilt University Great Performances
Mary Luft, Tigertail Productions
Gail Robinson-Butler, West Kentucky Community and Technical College
Debra Smith, Newberry Opera House
George Thompson, Georgia Institute of Technology Ferst Center for the Arts

Program Director

Nikki Estes, South Arts

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