



DANCE & BEYOND FORUM

Tools and Methods for Evaluating Your Production and Performance

26 April 2010

Dance and Beyond are forums run by DANZ as part of the Wellington City Council Toi Poneke Arts Hub projects. The forums aim to explore issues relating to dance. On the 26th of April 2010 the focus of this forum was on developing professional practice in production, with guest speakers Lyne Pringle and Dawn Sanders. Following the forum there was a general discussion.

This resource has been made out of the excellent forum discussion in order to share ideas and support the industry widely across New Zealand.

Lyne Pringle

Lyne has many years experience as a choreographer, producer, director, dancer, teacher and mentor. Lyne outlined her current work focus. She feels she has a clear sense of purpose at this point in her career and this helps in terms of evaluating her performances.

Here are some key points to consider and some thought provocations on dance performance and production.

Evaluating a performance or project:

- Have clear goals (you can see if you've reached your goals when stepping back to evaluate)
- Know what your piece is about – sometimes this may only be at a tacit level.
- What is the passion or fascinating idea of your show? What are you researching?
- Trust that artistic process.
- Who is your audience?
- Know your audience; do your research; think clearly about what you are trying to communicate.
- What do you want your audience to see/get from the show?
- Know what you want to achieve. Have you achieved the goals you set for yourself?
- How do you measure success? What does success look like? Have stakeholders been satisfied? If so why? If not why? What needed to be changed in the process?
- How would this affect the outcome? What needed to change in the performance/event to make it more successful?
- Get feedback from trusted colleagues and from punters.
- Be brave and seek the constructive feedback that you perhaps don't want to hear.

It is important to evaluate the performance/work on every level. There will need to be a gestation period, for the artist to find the time and space to be ready, before taking in the feedback.

Selling your work is also an evaluation because if people don't come or it doesn't have an ongoing life then you need to re-evaluate the show.

In terms of on selling the work to presenters:

Selling/pitching your work/proposal is a "performance".

- You need to tell people what it would do for them, rather than just telling them what your show is about.
- Why would their audiences come to see your work?
- At the end of the day it's about the work being seen and aiming for sustainability of the art practice and longevity for art works. We should aim to build repertoire that reaches as wide an audience as possible.

That said of course there will be times when this is not the priority of the work, artists do need time in their research when the process and outcome are not audience driven but this comes back to objectives in the first place.

“Personally I am not interested in the ‘lonely artist in the garret’ model of practice.” Lyne Pringle

Dawn Sanders QSM

Dawn is a producer, event organizer, lecturer and mentor with many years experience in dance and performing arts.

The focus of this discussion was on what one should be looking at when assessing a performance, for the future development of the work.

Dawn opened with a provocation: *“Why do you have the expectation that people should pay to come and see your show? Even your parents or partner or closest friends or especially sponsors don’t have to. You have to make them want to attend.”*

“Think of your audience as a friend and how you would like to engage with them.”

In order to give substance to the evaluation of your show, there are some fundamental questions which need to be answered:

- Why did you create it?
- Who was your target market?
- What was their age...demographic...ethnicity?

- Did they come?
- Who else came?
- Do you feel your marketing fitted these sectors?
- Was the image/branding of the performance right?
- Did you describe it accurately in the media?
- Did they need programme notes, or did it speak its own message well enough?
- Did it tell the story/portray the message/create the illusion?
- How do you know?

And then...

- How well did you feel the choreography worked?
- Did you consider the venue?...seating/sightlines?
- Was it acoustically appropriate for your audience?

- Did you seek any type of audience feedback?
- How important did you feel the critic’s review was?
- How important were your friends’ comments?
- Did you seek them on Facebook/Twitter/...or a questionnaire?

- Have you been invited back?
- Do you wish to perform in that venue again?

- Does/should your work have an extended ‘life’?
- If yes, why do you think so?
- Would you like to rework it or perform it again as is?

Do you want to appeal the same demographics – and would they be present in a new location?
Good luck! ...and lots of good management!! © Dawn Sanders QSM

Forum general discussion

After the forum there was a general discussion, the following is a précis of that discussion.

- Marketing – if the marketing is very different from the show content this can be misleading.
- Promotional material – test it before you go to print. You need to get feedback from people outside of the production team, family or friends, as to what they think the show is about from images or marketing.
- Image on poster – this doesn't have to be the same as the show costumes but needs to have the same spirit as the show.
- It is ok to challenge society (content of your show or the message you're trying to put across) but it can't be so tasteless or bad that it puts people/audience off. There is a broader art-form and professional responsibility to dance to safeguard our art-form.
- Get quotes from your audience as to what they thought of the show. You can use these for email marketing for the next day/week.
- Evaluations, work out a series of questions to ask the audience:
 - What were the high points?
 - At what stage did your mind start to wander?
- For funding applications – you need just the facts. It is advisable not to use words that are too emotive in the funding applications, only the facts are required.
- Consider if your dance shows needs to have notes in the programme e.g. to explain the symbolism to people. If the audience does not know the symbolism then how will they understand it? The more people have a context for a work the more they are able to engage.
 - What don't they understand?
 - What couldn't they see/hear?
 - What stood out?

Prepared by Elizabeth Isaacs

© DANZ 2010

DANZ would like to thank Lyne Pringle, Dawn Sanders and all the participants in Dance & Beyond for their contribution.

For more DANZ resources go to, www.danz.org.nz/resources.php

Thank you Creative New Zealand for supporting the development of professional resources.