AFTER THE BALL IS OVER
Career transition for dancers around the world

Joan Jeffri

In 2000, the Research Center for Arts and Culture at Columbia University's Teachers College was approached by a board of persons knowledgeable about dance and the International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers (IOTPD) to provide data about the challenges and realities of dancers' career transition. This first study of its kind became a coordinated inquiry into the career transition of professional dancers in eleven different countries, culminating in a report written by William Baumol, Joan Jeffri, and David Throsby. The major areas of concern are: information that confirms what the field has always known about career transition, but did not have the numbers to support; and data that surprised the researchers. Our findings show that, in many instances, expectations of current dancers and realities of former dancers sometimes differ widely, providing important information for policy makers, funders and supporters interested in furthering continued employment of artists.

KEYWORDS dance; dancer; dancing; career transition; artist; employment

The retiring dancer and heartbroken lover are never more alike than when their relationships end. (Kevin MacKenzie, Artistic Director, American Ballet Theatre, quoted in Upper (2004))

All dancers share a devotion to an art form that requires discipline, dedication and commitment. And while they also share the indignities o' low pay with many other different types of workers, as professionals they are uniquely committed to long hours of effort required to perfect their art, while undergoing the risk of physical injury and emotional distress, and forging a career that is likely to begin in elementary school and end before they are 40. For professional dancers reaching the end of their performing careers, the economic, psychological and educational difficulties for which they are often ill-equipped are likely to have a profound effect on the rest of their lives. If we are to sustain a cultural activity that rests on human accomplishment, we must understand the career transition difficulties faced by those who are some of its best exemplars.

In 2000, the Research Center for Arts and Culture at Columbia University's Teachers College was approached by a board of persons knowledgeable about dance and the International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers (IOTPD) based in Lausanne, Switzerland, to provide some hard data about the challenges and realities of dancers' career
transition. This first study of its kind became a coordinated inquiry into the career transition of professional dancers in eleven different countries. Sample surveys were undertaken in three countries – Australia, Switzerland and the United States – to provide insights into the challenges of career change as seen from the viewpoint of the individual dancer. In addition, country profiles were provided for eight additional countries – Canada, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Mexico and the Netherlands – in order to illustrate further the global environment of dance.

Particular transition-related programs and practices were identified around the world to illustrate the breadth and depth of responses to transition, including information on the four existing transition centers in Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. A report presenting both data and analysis was written by William Baumol, Joan Jeffri and David Throsby, and a companion document with recommendations for the field was written by Mindy Levine. In December 2004, an international conference in Monaco brought together practitioners, policy makers, educators, artistic and executive directors, dancers and former dancers from all over the world to turn these findings into action plans (see Appendix A for the Declaration from the Monaco Conference).

What follows is a look at major areas of concern in our study from two points of view: first, information that confirmed what the field has always known about career transition, but did not have the numbers to support; and second, data that surprised the researchers. Both of these sets of findings serve as a basis for effecting change in both policy and practice in the dance community. Indeed, the Monaco Conference came up with a series of action plans for practitioners and administrators around the world. Additionally, this initial investigation has shown the breadth and depth of the subject of transition and it is hoped it will provide the underpinning for continued future research.

Defining Dancers and Transition

Our concern in this study was essentially with professional practitioners. We consider professionalism to derive from a combination of factors including a dancer's training, career commitment, standard of work, income and time allocation, and we acknowledge that precise definitions of professional status must differ among countries. We also acknowledge that income alone may be insufficient as the criterion, since some professional artists go for long periods without earning any income at all. Similarly, time spent in employment as a dancer may be inadequate, since many professional dancers have to spend considerable time at other jobs in order to survive. Commitment to a career and attainment of professional performance standards are clearly also relevant, but difficult to measure. While certain countries, in particular Canada and those in Scandinavia, have Status of the Artist policies that give rise to employment referral centers and social benefits, in countries like the United States and Mexico, artists have no such designation.

For this study, we distinguished among dancers working in five broad categories: classical/ballet, modern/contemporary, organized indigenous or folk dance, musical theatre or commercial dance and "other" – a catch-all category that encompasses dancers working in cinema, television and other industries such as revues, fashion shows, cruise ships and corporate events, as well as less-organized forms of dance activity. In all five of these categories, it is common to find individual dancers whose work spans more than one of the fields at a given time or at different stages in their careers. While we received few responses to our survey from indigenous/folk dancers, we did receive more substantial responses from dancers in the other dance categories listed above.
Another possible definitional problem relates to the distinction between current and former dancers, a matter of relevance when surveying individual dancers about their expected or actual career transition experience. Some dancers who responded to our surveys were reluctant or unwilling to identify themselves as "former dancers", arguing that there is no fine line distinguishing a current dancer from a former dancer. For example, a male respondent in the United States who identified himself as a former dancer for the purpose of the survey wrote:

I don’t consider being a choreographer much different than being a dancer. . . . I just had to stop dancing . . . in order to meet my responsibilities as a choreographer. How can choreographers not be considered dancers? Dance teachers are still dancers. I consider myself to be a current dancer even though I choreograph dance more than I perform it.

Some dancers always consider themselves dancers, illustrating their extremely strong identification with the profession.

Despite this, however, there is no doubt that an individual’s career as an active performer does come to an end at some point, even though a post-transition career involving such activities as choreography or dance teaching does require occasional dance steps or movements to be performed or demonstrated. We adopted the conventional usage of the term “transition” in this study to describe the career stage during which a dancer stops actively performing (often gradually) for reasons of age, health, injury, or some other cause, and moves to a new activity, whatever that may be. We use the terms “current” and “former” dancers to distinguish between those who are still actively performing and those who are not.

Method of Study

A written survey of current and former dancers was distributed in Australia, Switzerland (in German and French) and the United States. In Australia, 1,412 surveys were sent out, yielding 243 (17.2%) usable returns. Of those, 35.0% were from current and 65.0% from former dancers. In Switzerland, 766 surveys were sent out, yielding 368 (48.0%) usable returns. Of those, 41.6% were former and 54.9% were current dancers. In the United States, 1,000 dancers received surveys, yielding 220 (22%) usable returns. Of those, 77.7% were former and 22.3% were current dancers. The methodology differed in each country: in Australia, the Australia Council’s database of dancers was the primary source of subjects; in the United States, names were gathered from professional schools and conservatories, dance companies, unions, dance service organizations and the New York-based Career Transition for Dancers; in Switzerland, the survey was delivered and administered by hand to companies all over the country. Local research partners were contracted to create the eleven country profiles mentioned above. The country profiles presented a context for dance in each country in terms of public and private support, numbers of companies, dancers, dance schools, dance venues, dance audiences and dancer career transition initiatives.

The Global Context for Dance

Our country profiles conducted in eleven different countries shed light on the context for dance around the world. There are major differences in both numbers and types of dancers, as well as how those dancers are classified, in each country. In 2000, there were 20,900
dancers in the United States according to the Census; 10,997 dancers in Japan including Japanese classical, modern/contemporary and ballet/classical dancers as well as teachers and amateurs affiliated with organizations under the Japanese union-like organization Geidankyo; and 155 dancers in Switzerland’s six official companies and another estimated 300+ “unregistered” dancers. In 2001, according to the Canada Council for the Arts, there were 6,405 dancers in Canada, and in the same year, there were 1,382 dancers and choreographers in Australia. In 2003, there were approximately 5,000 dancers in France and 700 in Hungary.

There is a substantial amount of direct government funding of dance in all countries studied except for the United States, where public support is provided mainly indirectly via the tax deductibility of contributions to dance organizations. Figures for overall government support for the arts in countries such as Germany (US$10.5 billion in 2001) and the Netherlands (US$340.4 million in 2002) are somewhat overwhelming to Americans, where in 2001 the National Endowment for the Arts budget was US$104.8 million and grants to dance were US$2 million.

Dance is an important component of the performing arts, accounting for a total of about 33 million attendances annually in the eleven countries we studied, with the share of population attending dance events annually varying from less than 1% to approximately 15%. Overall, there has been significant growth in the dance sector in many countries over the last ten years, measured in terms of numbers of dancers, numbers of dance companies and audience size.

**Issues of Career Transition**

**Length of Career**

It is well known in the field of dance, particularly for classical dancers, that the span of a professional career is short in years compared to most other professions. While most dancers acknowledge this, our results show that currently active dancers expect to continue their performing careers well into their forties. However, former dancers reported that although they thought they could continue until their late thirties, on average they actually stopped dancing professionally in their early to mid-thirties. Some 25% of Australian, 42.9% of Swiss and 22.5% of American current dancers think they will stop dancing between 35 and 39. In reality, 29% of Australian former dancers stopped between 25 and 29; the same percentage in Switzerland stopped exactly a decade later, between 35 and 39; and the same percentage of dancers stopped dancing between the ages of 30 and 39 in the United States.

**The End of a Career in Dance**

The impending end of a dance career brings with it a series of concerns about the future (see Table 1). It is well known that physical injury truncates many dancers’ careers and, in fact, this was confirmed by half the current dancers in Australia, Switzerland and the United States who reported that they expected physical problems would pose the most serious challenges at the end of their careers. What surprised us was that in the United States the same percentage of current dancers was equally challenged by the difficulty of deciding what to do next.

Former dancers reacted somewhat differently, telling us what their actual challenges were at the end of their careers. While physical problems were still high on the list (for over
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current dancers</td>
<td>Former dancers</td>
<td>Current dancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected</td>
<td>Actual</td>
<td>Expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical problems</td>
<td>59  62.8</td>
<td>65  41.4</td>
<td>102  50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of status</td>
<td>34  36.2</td>
<td>41  26.1</td>
<td>34   16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of income</td>
<td>54  57.4</td>
<td>67  42.7</td>
<td>93   45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of support network</td>
<td>26  27.7</td>
<td>29  18.5</td>
<td>33   16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional problems</td>
<td>25  26.6</td>
<td>38  24.2</td>
<td>79   38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty deciding what to do</td>
<td>41  43.6</td>
<td>48  30.6</td>
<td>79   36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of emptiness</td>
<td>47  50.0</td>
<td>49  31.2</td>
<td>63   40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other challenge</td>
<td>4   4.3</td>
<td>19  12.1</td>
<td>19   9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6   6.4</td>
<td>7   4.5</td>
<td>10   4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
37.9%), in Australia loss of income was deemed more serious (42.7%), in Switzerland emotional problems almost equalled the challenge of physical ones (37.3%) and in the United States these issues were exceeded by a sense of emptiness (48.5%). Former dancer Edward Villella said: “I fought like crazy not to be depressed. ... I wouldn’t admit that I was depressed. But I certainly think I was for about ten years” (Upper 2004). These findings underscore the common notion that the end of a career in dance is “one of life’s little deaths” that dancers often say they must mourn the loss of before they can continue in another career.

Work after Transition

It has long been thought that dancers who stop dancing become teachers or choreographers. When we asked dancers what work they most preferred after transition, current American dancers were less sure of what they would prefer with 20.5% saying they did not know, while over 27.8% of Australian and Swiss current dancers said they would prefer to choreograph (and only 17.9% of Americans said this). Teaching was in fact low on the list: only 2.6% of American dancers, 2.7% of Australian dancers and 10.7% of Swiss dancers said they would prefer to teach dance in their next career.

The work former dancers actually did was more in line with our original premise: 51.6% of Australian former dancers, 33.3% of Swiss and 32.2% of American former dancers turned to choreography, while 71.3% of Australian, 68.6% of Swiss and 53.2% of American former dancers turned to teaching. This contradicts a statement from the First International Symposium of the IOTPD in 1995 that claimed: “Relatively few former dancers become dance teachers or choreographers” (Leach 1997). Interestingly, teaching, while offering employment, did not always offer the most satisfaction. According to both current and former dancers, only 11.5% of Australian, 3.5% of Swiss and 4.1% of Americans chose dance teacher or coach as the occupation offering the most professional satisfaction.

In our interviews in some countries during the first phase of this study, there seemed to be a conflict between those who championed former dancers who stayed “in the field” and those who encouraged them to enter any profession they chose. The desire to keep former dancers in the field may be somewhat unrealistic since there are a limited number of jobs as choreographers, dance teachers, dance coaches and with dance companies, even in such related areas as costume design. And, of course, this is affected by the size and conditions of the labor market in each country. Our results were mixed: in the United States, 35.1% of former dancers worked outside dance and the arts altogether and almost the same percentage (34.5%) did other dance-related work. However, in our two other survey countries, results varied considerably. In Australia, 35.7% worked outside dance and the arts and 43.3% did other dance-related work; in Switzerland, only 16.3% worked outside dance and the arts and 24.2% did other dance-related work. This has not been the experience of the four transition centers, which suggest that no more than 10–15% of their clients moved into a dance-related career.

Income before Transition

In the majority of the countries profiled, studies suggest that dancers are the most poorly paid artists. In Canada, among all artistic occupations, the average income of dancers was one of the lowest. In 2001, the average annual income for a Canadian dancer was just CAN$14,600 (US$11,100), or less than half the annual average income of CAN$31,800
(US$24,200) for the entire labor force. These low incomes can, of course, be increased if countries provide substantial government support. For example, in the Netherlands, a highly state-subsidized country where 55% of dancers work full time, the mean (average) annual salary for dancers in 2000 was 27,600 (US$34,000).

Because of their low average incomes, dancers are often forced to take on additional jobs, both inside and outside the dance community, to supplement their earnings. In Japan, dancers’ average annual income in 2000 was ¥3.4 million (US$27,618) and median annual income was ¥2.5 million (US$20,325), with less than one-fifth of the total income derived from dance performance. According to Throsby and Holl ster (2003), in Australia in 2000/01, dancers’ mean annual income from dance activity was A$16,700 (US$12,300) while their mean total annual income, including earnings from other sources, was A$26,900 (US$19,900). Our survey results show that the mean income in American dollars of current dancers from their dance activity is $15,011 in Australia, $24,416 in Switzerland and $20,251 in the United States.

In many cases, dancers’ incomes depend on the size and type of company that employs them. In the United States, the average 1995 earnings of professional dancers ranged from US$427 a week (for dancers in medium-sized companies) to US$816 a week (for dancers in large companies). In Hungary, 2002 salaries ranged from a low of HUF60,000 (US$260) a week for folk and modern dancers to a high of HUF120,000 (US$515) a week for ballet dancers. Table 2 provides dancer income figures by country. Note that the measurement of income (what is included and what is not) varies substantially among countries in the table. Nevertheless, the conclusion can be drawn that in most of the countries studied dancers are not well remunerated when compared with other occupations requiring similar amounts of training.

**Income after Transition**

Not surprisingly, the current dancers surveyed in Australia, Switzerland and the United States have only a vague idea about what they may earn after transition, and significant numbers answered “don’t know” when asked what they expected. Nevertheless, about one-third of current dancers in all three of the countries surveyed said they expected to earn more after they stopped dancing. Only 15% expected to earn less. Our survey data suggest that, in reality, those expecting to earn more are likely to be disappointed at first. However, in the longer term, it seems their hope for a higher income may be fulfilled. Overall, a majority of surveyed dancers finish up earning more after transition than before, but almost 30% earn post-transition incomes that are lower than when they were dancers.

For former dancers working in a dance-related field, the mean annual salaries are US$16,519 in Australia, US$20,955 in Switzerland and US$12,182 in the United States, all substantially lower than for current dancers. Former dancers working outside the arts earned the very low mean annual salaries of US$8,889 in Australia, US$8,509 in Switzerland and US$15,854 in the United States5 The results of our survey indicate, too, that the income prospects of dancers who stop dancing at a relatively older age are less favorable than those who stop dancing at an earlier age. In all three countries, the post-transition incomes of dancers who undergo transition before the age of 30 are higher than for those who stop dancing beyond that age. It is also noteworthy that a greater percentage of dancers who said they were very aware of the challenges posed by transition reported increases in income than those not very aware of them.
### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Pay period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2000–2001</td>
<td>AU$16,700 mean ($12,300), AU$12,900 median ($9,500)</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>CA$14,600 ($11,100)</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>CA$15,000 ($11,400)</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>€1,700 ($2,000)$\textsuperscript{d} or DM2,650–3,850 ($1,665–2,400)$\textsuperscript{e} for union dancers in the corps; €3,000–3,500 ($3,700–4,300) for solo contracts. Commercial dancers earn €500–1,500 ($600–1,800) per evening</td>
<td>Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>HUF60,000–120,000 ($280–560)</td>
<td>Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>¥3,397 mean ($27,618), ¥2,500 median ($20,325)</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>600–6,500 pesos ($60–650) for contemporary dancer in a subsidized company; 8,000–13,000 pesos ($1,300–4,800) for classical dancer plus a quarterly bonus of 15,000–20,000 pesos ($1,500–2,000)</td>
<td>Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>€27,600 ($33,700)</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>CHF3,800 ($3,000) for corps-de-ballet members of official companies; CHF2,500 ($2,000) for independents in short-term projects</td>
<td>Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$27,950 mean$\textsuperscript{f}</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $a$ The full report lists the costs of living in each country, which helps to contextualize this table (see Baumol \textit{et al.} 2004). $b$ Includes only creative income. $c$ In this table and other places in Baumol \textit{et al.} (2004), England (not the United Kingdom) is referenced. This is because, in those instances, our information came from the Arts Council of England. $d$ As reported by the Federal Institute of Labor (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit), October 2003. Regional and branch-related differences and additional payments may apply. These salaries are only for group dancers; soloists negotiate their incomes individually. $e$ According to the Normalvertrag Tanz (Deutscher Bühnenverein, association of theater employees), the salary range depends on qualification, position and age, with lower salaries in eastern Germany. $f$ United States Department of Labour, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2002).

### Retraining

Our research indicates that the skills and experience that professional dancers accumulate during their dancing years, including self-discipline, team work and stamina, are significant and transferable resources that are in danger of being wasted as their active dancing careers come to an end. Ironically, while dancers invest an enormous amount of time in their education, much of this training does not confer a formal degree so that future careers often require additional education. Even in the United States, where formal higher education...
is more prevalent than in our other two survey countries, only 30% of both current and former dancers have a bachelor's degree.

Thirty-seven to 38% of current dancers in all three countries expected to pursue further education. It should be noted here that the general trend in lifelong learning, particularly in the United States, bodes well for dancers seeking further education. Where once dancers retraining for an alternative career might have been seen as “betraying the cause”, multiple careers are now seen as the norm in many countries.

Nonetheless, retraining comes with significant challenges for both individual dancers and those trying to help them transition to another career.

Cost of Retraining

The highest percentages of current dancers responding to the survey in all three countries plan to finance further study with their own funds (51% in Australia, 39% in Switzerland and 43% in the United States). The expectation that post-career study will largely have to be self-financed is confirmed in practice in the three surveyed countries. The majority of former dancers in all three countries financed their further education with their own funds (51.0% in Australia, 49.1% in Switzerland and 51.5% in the United States). The average cost of retraining in Australia was AU$11,000 (US$8,800), CHF18,000 (US$14,000) in Switzerland and US$27,000 in the United States. In Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, however, retraining and subsistence grants have apparently minimized the need for such personal financial investment by dancers, according to information provided to us by the career transition centers. In some cases, retraining can even begin while dancers are still actively dancing, thus precluding the need for investments soon after transition.

Retraining and Its Effects on Income

Although early formal retraining leads to a substantial increase in income immediately after transition, in the longer term it is not particularly far ahead of the alternatives (later retraining or the absence of any intention to retrain). The expectation of higher post-transition income for dancers with formal retraining, especially pre-transition retraining, is not borne out in our data. In Australia, while twelve months after transition, 39% of those who had completed retraining before transition had increased their incomes over the pre-transition levels, 56% who had not yet completed retraining were also benefiting financially and 42% of those who had no retraining plans experienced higher incomes as well.6 A similar exception occurs in the data for the United States, where 43% of those who had completed retraining before transition had increased their incomes by the time of the surveys, but 46% of those who had no intention of retraining were also receiving higher incomes than before. So although early retraining clearly benefits some individuals, it is not the only answer since a majority of dancers who did not undergo such retraining nevertheless finished up with a higher income than they had earned when they were dancers. This was somewhat surprising and also somewhat discouraging to those involved in retraining programs for transition.

Awareness of Transition

To the researchers’ surprise, dancers were more aware of transition than we expected: 70% of Australian, 58.8% of Swiss and 83.3% of American current dancers say there are “very
aware” of the challenges of transition. These are much larger percentages than those for former dancers (35.3%, 48.3% and 33.9% for the three countries respectively) and suggest several explanations. First, this awareness may be generational and the former dancers may not have had as many opportunities to consider transition issues as their younger colleagues. Second, in the last twenty years, the four career transition centers have become vital and active in the dance community and studies like the National Endowment for the Arts’ *Life After Performing* conducted by Eilen Wallach (1988) have helped to give the subject currency. And third, very much like occupational injuries for musicians, which were well-known but kept concealed for many years, transition has begun to be viewed by some as an integral part of a dancer’s career process rather than its annihilation.

Overall, the great majority of current dancers claim to be either “very aware” or “somewhat aware” of the challenges that transition will pose (97.9%, 85.9% and 92.4% in the United States, Switzerland and Australia, respectively), but many former dancers concede that they were in fact ill-prepared for this process.

Our survey results also show a markedly higher level of post-transition career satisfaction among those fully prepared to meet transition than among those not fully prepared. Moreover, the proportion of those fully prepared and enjoying higher incomes in the immediate post-transition period was larger than the corresponding proportion for those not fully prepared. This income advantage apparently associated with preparedness for transition was maintained in the longer term, though the distance between the fully-prepared and the not-fully-prepared groups appears to narrow over time.

**Support Systems for Dancers in Career Transition**

There are many types of support that are helpful to dancers in the career transition process, including financial assistance, emotional support, counseling programs and services, job search preparation, advice and information, and assistance in education and training. Dancers report that this support comes from a variety of sources, including dance companies, unions, service organizations, and family and friends as well as the four transition centers. About 60% of former dancers in Australia, Switzerland and the United States identified family and friends as the most important source of support for them during this critical period. There now follows a summary of some of the model programs offering retraining, counseling and other services to dancers facing transition.

Four career transition centers currently exist in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands, which have made significant progress in helping many dancers in these countries deal with the challenges of career change.

*Career Transition for Dancers* (CTFD), with offices in New York City and Los Angeles, provides a wide range of career programs and services free of charge to assist in career transition for current and former dancers. Since 1985, it has served more than 2,600 dancers nationwide and awarded more than US$1.7 million in educational and entrepreneurial grants. A feature of CTFD’s orientation is its effort to help dancers determine for themselves the steps they will take in their career transition and, by making its services dancer-driven, it seeks to encourage dancer initiative and independence.

*The Dancer Transition Resource Centre* (DTRC) in Canada is a membership organization that offers broad-based services to dancers on entering, during and after their professional performing careers. Academic, career, financial, legal and personal counseling are offered to its constituents, as well as the DTRC Dancer Award Fund that gives grants for skills courses,
retraining and subsistence. In addition, the DTRC provides information to the general dance community, offering a newsletter, website, other publications, conferences and seminars.

The United Kingdom’s center for career transition for professional dancers, *Dancers’ Career Development* (DCD), offers a wide range of practical, psychological and financial retraining and career transition services for professional dancers, including educational advice, career coaching, emotional counseling, résumé and interview guidance, grants for retraining, business start-up grants and ongoing support for professional dancers. The DCD Company Fund Division operates a scheme in cooperation with dance companies, which contribute funds to be used to assist their dancers in transition. Currently, nine British companies participate in this scheme. The DCD also operates an Independent Trust Division that supports independent dancers and dancers in the commercial sector, funded through grants and fundraising activities.

The Dutch Retraining Program for Professional Dancers (Stichting Oomscholingsregeling Dansers [SOD]) provides services to dancers in career transition in the Netherlands. Dancers pay a small monthly contribution to the program, which offers income support and grants for retraining, as well as counseling services, particularly career counseling. The program has recently been redesigned to provide grants to dancer’s in transition to cover study and subsistence expenses.

These four career transition centers are independent, specialized service organizations with a total of 90 years of accumulated experience in the field of dance career transition. The centers have all found the problems of dancers in transition to be remarkably similar, involving economic, psychological and educational issues that need to be addressed. Over the years, each of these organizations has developed a range of programs and services that focus on the different stages in a dancer’s career, and have provided integrated support that is individually tailored to the needs of each dancer. Despite these similarities, the kinds of assistance provided through the four career transition centers vary, depending on cultural differences, the type and amount of social, health and educational support provided by government, and the resources available to the transition centers and other career transition programs. In addition, the four centers are supported in different ways – from the American center which raises philanthropic dollars, to the Dutch government-sponsored model to those that exist with a combination of government and private funding.

Two other organizations are also noteworthy. The *International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers* (IOTPD) plays a significant leadership and advocacy role in the field. The IOTPD’s main objectives are to help professional dancers in the process of career transition and promote awareness of the contribution the dancer makes to society, the needs of the dancer during the transition process, and the benefits of a successful transition to a future productive career. The *Swiss Association for the Career Re-orientation of Professional Dancers* (NPT/RDP) provides career counseling and training as well as financial support for unemployed workers, including dancers in transition, in Switzerland.

In addition to these programs, a number of dance companies and dance schools around the world provide transition services specifically tailored to their own needs. Examples include companies such as the Birmingham Royal Ballet (UK), the Houston Ballet (USA), the Nederlands Dans Theater (Netherlands), the Opéra National de Paris (France), the New York City Ballet (USA), the Pacific Northwest Ballet (USA), the Escuela del Ballet Folklórico de México de Amalia Hernández (México), and schools like the Arts Education School (UK), Boston Ballet School (USA) and St Mary’s College of California, School of Extended Education...
(USA), among others. Such programs provide a wide variety of career transition assistance for dancers, including support for training, job search and information provision.\(^7\)

Dancers uniformly find specific transition programs helpful, when such programs are available. Among the three countries surveyed, participation is greatest in the United States, where transition programs have been and continue to be more common than in Australia and Switzerland. The increased availability of programs in all three countries in recent years is evidenced by the fact that participation among current dancers is greater than that among former dancers in each case. Even so, taken overall, the majority of dancers in all three surveyed countries have not participated in transition programs.

**Some Remaining Challenges**

While this study has provided information for a deeper understanding of dancers and the transition process, it may be only the beginning of a larger investigation in which dancer transition should be seen in a much larger context. Workers around the world no longer have the security or constraint (depending on one's point of view) of having a single job from youth to middle or old age. Multiple careers as well as multiple jobs are not only the prospect of artists. While schemes to nurture, retrain and capitalize on the skills of good employees occur in many occupations and in many countries, generally they have not been transferred to the arts.

If there is one central lesson about career transition for dancers we have learned it is that transition occurs over a period of time, and the dance-related attributes of commitment, loyalty and discipline are transferable to many other occupations. Yet we have more to learn about the real nature of that transition. For example, many dancers undertake a hiatus from dancing and, rather than leaving the arena altogether or permanently, they exit and re-enter the marketplace at different points and sometimes in different capacities. This "career cycling" is something we know little about, and while there is some evidence it occurs in a number of countries, it bears further study.

We also need more information about exactly how dancer employment manifests itself in different kinds of dance in comparison to other art forms and in the larger context of workforce employment. Scholars (e.g., Aiper et al. 1996; Menger 2001; Throsby, Towe 1993) have done substantial work on artists' careers. Menger (2001), for example, explores the tremendous uncertainty of artists' employment. Artists rely more and more on short-term contracts that give them the appearance of contingent workers. And, indeed, the low job loyalty and self-management attributes Menger says artists may need to survive may be quite different for a principal dancer at a state company, the founder of a modern dance troupe and a freelance dancer.

For the most part, our data on career transition for dancers show that expectations and realities differ. This knowledge is important not only for current and future transition centers and programs, but for policy makers and funders interested in maximizing human capital from a highly disciplined, dedicated and committed workforce at the end of a special relationship.

**NOTES**

1. This article is based on the initial report entitled *Making Changes: Facilitating the Transition of Dancers to Post-Performance Careers* (Baumol et al. 2004). Special thanks to Project Coordinator Lauren Tehan for her perceptive editing.
2. While it is common among artist-researchers to define professional artists in a variety of ways (some of the most common include income, full-time employment, formal education and professional recognition), use of this term can be extremely narrow. Differences by country, level of government subsidy, employment and educational opportunities and dance form (classical, modern, etc.) make it impossible to arrive at a universal definition.

3. Dance in Germany country profile in *Making Change* compiled by Pia Hartmann, Harmann Nagel Art & Consulting, Germany.

4. Dance in the Netherlands country profile in *Making Changes* prepared by Paul Bronkhorst, figures from the Dutch Ministry of Culture.

5. According to the United States Census Bureau (2001), the average poverty threshold for one person under 65 years of age in the United States in 2001 was US$9,214.

6. Cross tabulations presented here and elsewhere in the article were calculated as whole numbers (not to the tenth decimal point.)

7. In the full report, an appendix lists a variety of transition initiatives, including partnerships between dance companies and universities; preparation programs in schools and companies; programs initiated by service, labor and membership organizations; and government initiatives and model schemes for pensions like the cne in the United Kingdom.

REFERENCES


Appendix A.
The aDvANCE Project Declaration Of Monaco December 18, 2004

In every culture and in every time people have danced – to celebrate and to mourn, to entertain and to enlighten, to affirm the spirit and the body, and to create moments of transcendent beauty and transformation. Temporal and fleeting, dance communicates powerful messages that resonate across language and cultural barriers. Reaching beyond words, dancers embody powerful messages about the central dramas of human life – be they spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic, or political …

Career transition is inevitable, and therefore an integral aspect of a dancer’s life.


In the past ten years there has been growing international awareness of the multiple dimensions of career transition. In addition to the growth and development of the four formal transition programs that were organized between 1973 and 1986 (United Kingdom, Canada, United States, and The Netherlands), initiatives have been taken in a number of countries to improve the circumstances of dancers and their ability to address career transition issues.

Major challenges remain. The aDvANCE Project was formed to commission an international research study and a companion advocacy document. The following observations emerged from the process:

We know of no other occupation that requires such extensive training, which is held in such esteem as a contribution to culture and pays so little …

In the long-run, the vitality of dance activity itself requires attention to the welfare of those engaged in it …

The inadequacy of transition support not only creates significant challenges for individual dancers, but also imposes a social cost in the form of wasted human capital.

(William Baumol, Joan Jeffri and David Throsby, Making Changes: Facilitating The Transition Of Dancers To Post-Performing Careers, 2004)

Participants from fifteen countries gathered in Monaco from December 16 to 18, 2004, to discuss and reflect upon these documents. The participants embraced the conclusions and recommendations of these reports, and agreed on the following:

- Career transition assistance is a key indicator of the degree to which a particular community values the art of dance and the professional dancer.
- Dancers, dance schools and educators, dance companies and their staff, unions, other dance organizations, governments and their agencies, funders, the audience, and the larger society all share a responsibility to deal with transition challenges.
- The professional dancer has a set of highly developed transferable skills that are of great value to the job market and society in general.

Accordingly, the participants resolve:
To work together to develop methods of providing dancer-driven transition services appropriate to the particular circumstances of each community and to all professional dancers in that community, and to support each other internationally in these efforts.

To collect and share information – such as examples of best practices, specific program models, research and other tools – through the International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers and its website, www.iotpd.org.

To promote transition solutions through existing relationships and new partnerships within and outside the dance community.

To advocate:

- For recognition that dancers should enjoy equivalent status to other professionals, including compensation and other terms and conditions of employment.
- For recognition that dancers also have career-specific concerns requiring targeted solutions.
- For necessary financial support and for acknowledgement that investment in retraining dancers is an ethical imperative, part of the cost of supporting dance, and one that benefits the dancer and the society in the long-term.

To reconvene in 2006 in collaboration with the 20th Anniversary of the Dutch Retraining Program.