

SCOFEA Impact Study Submission - Simcoe Contemporary Dancers

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General Comments:

One of the main pillars of our mandate is based on place (our community) and access to dance because of place (regional arts practice). Access to professional dance right here in Simcoe County but what is the attraction of that, of what we do, when you remove live in-person experiences? Can our online classes and performances really “compete” for views when you can live stream companies from around the world now?

Our work is about bodies in space and how those are arranged. How does this translate to new digital ways of making work? Virtual dance works and classes are not lesser than live experience, but they are certainly different. This new digital medium is also different than the physical studio experiences that drove us to this art form in the first place. For example. I did not want to be a film editor but now that’s how I have had to adjust how I choreograph. I like large group pieces but now can only do solos. I want to create a work that is rooted in physical contact, but we can’t be closer than 6 feet apart.

There is something about being together, sharing an experience of moving bodies that just cannot be replicated in the same way across digital platforms. Though we are thankful to have these platforms to help us stay connected, we long for being together, moving together and for sharing our work to our audience physically together.

Beyond the artistic challenges, we are also experiencing logistical challenges as we rely heavily on studio partnerships with local dance studios. These businesses are currently closed and suffering based on these closures. Our current sponsorship partners may not be there for us when we return to business based on how they recover themselves. Beyond our current partnerships, we have also been working diligently to expand our monetary sponsorships from local businesses. This also may not be possible as all businesses try to recover and will likely have fewer resources for community partnerships and support through sponsorships. We also have concerns about the future as fewer students may choose dance for a career, particularly with the added decimation of the school and studio programs that act as feeders to our company.

Financial Impacts:

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed to us how easily our local economy can be hurt/compromised. Beyond the economy, this crisis has also revealed how very fragile our art form is as an art form that is traditionally dependant on people being in the same physical space moving together.

Thus far due to the crisis we have modified, postponed or cancelled the following events:

Events modified: Confluence Alliston (box office closed – no day-of sales), classes now online (free),
Celebration of Dance (online performance and fundraiser)

Events postponed: Confluence Alliston Workshops, The WOW collection (8), community-based arts
project for Dusk Dances Barrie

Events cancelled: Holy Trinity in-school Workshops (2), Dusk Dances Barrie

As far as impact to our revenue generation – we generally expect to sell around 30% of our total tickets for paid performances at the door. Prior to closing the box office for Confluence Alliston, we had sold 60 tickets. The house holds 150. If we say we were going to sell 30% of what we already had sold –

we could have expected to sell an additional 18 tickets. This would have added another approximately \$360 to our box office revenues.

Our ongoing classes are pay what you can. We had recently been getting real traction with participants coming to class from the Newmarket area. In our last open/drop-in class we made \$40 in revenue. At this point we have had to cancel 5 weeks of drop-in classes resulting in approximately \$200 in lost revenue. Currently, we are hosting virtual classes with no compensation. We may create a Paypal button moving forward and have people sign up rather than free Instagram Live classes. However, offering a pay-what-you-can registered class truly will be a challenge given the extreme amount of competition for online dance classes right now – many of which are free.

Celebration of Dance has a virtual component and online fundraising component for this year. Through this initiative we raised \$750 for RVH. Historically, Celebration of Dance has raised \$2,000 for charity along with covering the cost of the event from box office, concession, and registration revenues. By modifying this event, we have approximately lost \$3,000 which includes the funds we would have donated to charity and the revenues to cover the cost of the event. The loss of Celebration of Dance is a huge blow to our dance community as it is one of the only events where young dancers can come together in a non-competitive environment.

By cancelling Dusk Dances Barrie, we have lost \$1,500 in box office and concession revenues. However, the Department of Canadian Heritage has agreed for all recipients of grant funds for 2020 to keep their grant funds so we are able to move forward and to pay our artists, technicians, and administrative staff accordingly. We will receive \$11,000 from the Department of Canadian Heritage and will pay that out as we had already planned. In addition to the Canadian Heritage Funding we also have received \$1,500 in sponsorship funds from Erin and Aaron Realty. Erin & Aaron have agreed for us to keep the funds but have requested that we defer it until the 2021 DDB. We had also approached

Meridian Credit Union for a sponsorship in the amount of \$8,000. While our initial conversations were very positive, conversations fell apart as COVID-19 caused cancellations and shutdowns.

At this point, we have experienced approximately \$5,273 in lost revenue. For our last fiscal completed year our total operating budget was \$33,063.16. This current loss in revenues is 15.94% of our total annual operating budget based on our 2018/2019 fiscal year.

This current loss of revenue mentioned above does not include the remainder of our contract from the WOW Collection (\$6,000) that we have yet to receive based on the postponement.

Additionally, we have currently lost the opportunity to potentially receive grant funding from two grants that have currently revoked their applications due to the uncertainty of COVID-19 including Simcoe County Cultural Grant (\$5,000) and Canada Council for the Arts Public Outreach (\$8,000).

Impacts, Challenges and Opportunities:

Even with all the challenges we are currently facing, we have seen strength and resilience in our local community. Local makers and business owners are resourceful. As closures set in, very quickly, artists, makers and business owners were taking steps to stay connected with their audiences and offer new ways to access our product. While this resourcefulness in no way makes up for the closures of performance venues and cancellations of performances, events and activities, it is inspiring to see the resourcefulness and ability to pivot. But, then again, on the other hand it is not so surprising, we as theatre and arts professionals understand how to solve a problem creatively and how to repurpose a problem into an opportunity while doing so on limited time and budget. The real question now is how do we continue this path? What is required to continue with long-term online making and how does that jive with our mandate and how we like to create as artists.

Looking into the future, a year from now and beyond, we will continue to be affected by this crisis. We will need to allocate more funds towards rental of appropriate physical space for rehearsals as

we will likely have fewer studio partners. We rely heavily on our studio sponsorships, but these businesses may no longer be able to afford to provide us with in-kind space.

We will also incur additional costs for "danger pay" for dancers with close physical contact. Historically, professional dance artists have been the lowest paid in the arts sector, and much like we are seeing with respect to other undervalued jobs, they have always had a large element of risk with respect to physical interaction and contact that were overlooked until this crisis. Based on Dancer's Alliance, a US based organization, danger pay will be 25% of the hourly wage which we base on Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists standard rates of pay for dance.

We will need to consider additional rehearsal costs for rebuilding of repertoire to allow for working/rehearsing together while socially distanced and/or reworking existing works to be socially distanced (i.e. our blocking in space is usually close together but how do we spread it apart? Artistically how does this affect what our audience will experience?) We will need to consider the rental or purchase of our own space to have 100% control over environment and cleaning practices.

We will need to invest in proper digital equipment to allow for us to create better quality digital materials including but not limited to cameras, light equipment, microphones, speakers, mobile dance floor/sprung floor. We are sure that the additional costs and concerns listed above will continue to evolve.

We have identified the following challenges both internal and external that are affecting our organization the most at this time:

Internally a challenge is the creation and development of skills required to develop engaging digital works and classes. We also struggle with the lack of funds to maintain our organisation whilst navigating a shift in mandate in the face of fierce competition for/with access to online content.

Externally, all the zooms a stage. How does SCD compete more internationally when our mandate is rooted in place and our local community. How do we overcome not being able to engage in person? How do we compete when so many well-known dance companies and organizations are currently also offering free virtual classes? How do we engage our community and entice them to participate in our content?

We have also identified our biggest opportunities at this time both internally and externally including:

Internally this crisis offers us the opportunity to innovate how we approach dance making and how we consider group training. As creators we can determine in the face of this unprecedented situation, how do we innovate and make a better performance landscape moving forward?

Externally, we could share more broadly internationally which is the flip side of our challenges above.

Takeaways and moving forward:

Our greatest takeaway from the COVID-19 pandemic related to our business and to our community is that what matters about art making is not only the creation but the process and togetherness and all the things that happen in and around the art making. For us as movers, bodies in the space learning from each other and moving together is critical to what we do and what we create. We think the art that is created from this time will provide a unique snapshot of the era through which is created, like all art, but in this instance, the uniqueness of the situation could lead to the creation of work that is quite distinct.

Moving forward, we will need continued support on the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal levels. As an organization we see value in infrastructure grants to support our shift to digital art making and funds towards renting safe spaces to make art. We also see value in potential capital grants to help us secure our own space through which we can control our own health and safety measures.