

NOVEMBER 18, 2016  
MESA ARTS CENTER

# PHOENIX DANCE CAFE



HOSTED BY [NUEBOX] & FACILITATED BY CHRISTOFOLO||SCHERMER CONSULTING

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# SUMMARY

The first ever Phoenix Dance Cafe brought together the professional Metro-Phoenix Dance Community to engage in a thoughtful dialogue about our local professional dance scene. Event attendees included educators, choreographers, dancers, studio owners, presenting organizations, artistic directors, and other dance community stakeholders who came to discuss where we are now, how we can leverage the resources currently available, and how we can collaborate to support and advance our community and its many members in key areas.

The professional Dance Community is broad and inclusive with members that have a desire for mastery and creativity, and an interest in performing, teaching, and/or sharing their experiences with others. The community also includes advocates and supporters of dance in Metro-Phoenix. The Dance Community identified their available resources and assets including physical & professional support, an openness to collaborations, and a shift away from hierarchical structures. While many resources for the Metro-Phoenix Dance Community were identified, there are ongoing challenges that make it difficult to leverage them for the good of the overall community. These challenges included a lack of support for professional careers, competing events, scarcity of dancers, and difficulty gaining traction due to a lack of density in certain geographic areas.

Participants determined that the things they would like to see in the future for the Metro-Phoenix Dance Community are 1) a stronger supporting infrastructure for dancers and choreographers, 2) an easy to navigate online resource for Metro-Phoenix Dance, 3) a centralized physical space with accessible resources, and 4) improved connections and collaborations within the broader Metro-Phoenix Community.

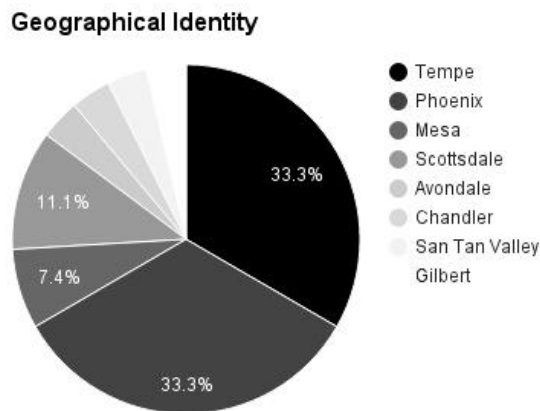
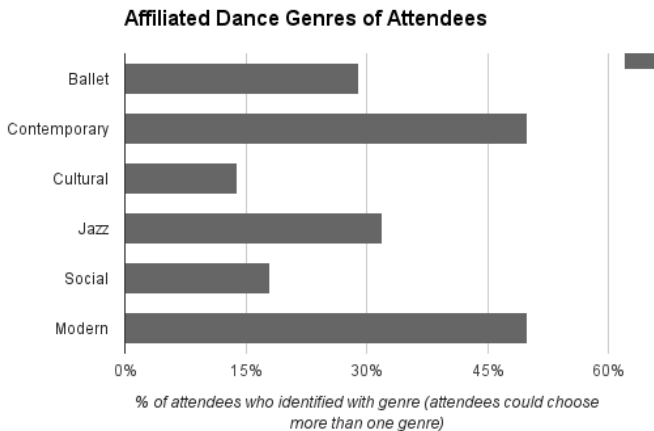
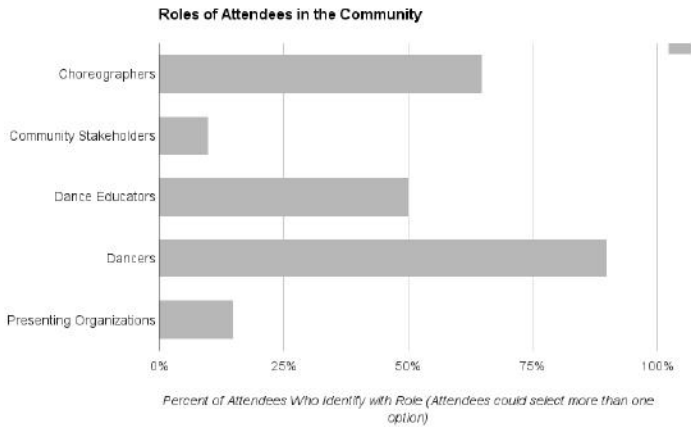


# ATTENDEES

The Dance Cafe was attended by a broad population that identified with having multiple roles in the community such as Choreographers (65%), Community Stakeholders (10%), Dance Educators (50%), Dancers (90%), and Presenting Organizations (15%). Attendees supported a variety of dance forms with the largest number of attendees who participate in Ballet (32%), Modern (50%), and Contemporary (50%). Other forms that were represented include: Burlesque, Indian Dance, Belly Dancing, Jazz, Musical Theater, Tap, Urban, Ballroom, and Swing. Attendees came from various parts of the Metro-Phoenix area, with the largest attendance from Phoenix (33%) and Tempe (33%). Other cities that were represented included Scottsdale, Mesa, Avondale, Chandler, San Tan Valley, and Gilbert.

**“Several of us define ourselves as hybrid artists. It is unusual to be just a dancer, choreographer, or teacher”**

*Karen Schupp, Independent Dance Artist and Dance Faculty at Arizona State University*



# COORDINATORS

The event was hosted by [nueBOX], an artist residency program that supports Metro-Phoenix based artists to create new work. The event was facilitated by Christofolo||Schmer Consulting, a national consulting organization that has been involved in organizational development and complex planning efforts in fields including health care, technology, digital marketing, law firms, travel and hospitality, education, non-profits, and government organizations. The event was also supported through [nueBOX]’s partnership with Mesa Arts Center and funding from the Arizona Commission on the Arts.



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During the workshop, the group collectively defined the Metro-Phoenix professional dance community. Taking time to define the professional dance community is important because it creates accountability in the community on specific topics (for example, paying dancers for their labor), empowers professional artists to advocate for themselves, and establishes an intrinsic sense of standards and expectations for the values, ethics, and quality of professional dance in Phoenix.

The professional dance community is broad and includes dancers, choreographers, supporters, students, teachers, advocates, studio owners, and revenue operators. Members of this community have qualities such as a desire for mastery and creativity, and an interest in performing, teaching, and sharing their experience with others. This community is specifically defined as “Metro-Phoenix” or “Valley-Based” dance.

**“A professional has a developed skill set that they share with others”**

Allyson Yoder, Head of Artist Development at [nueBOX]

# AVAILABLE RESOURCES & ASSETS



During the workshop, participants had an open discussion about the resources and assets that already exist for the dance community in Phoenix. By identifying what has already been established, the group was purposefully directed towards identifying the resources still needed in order to achieve greater artistic capacity. The group identified physical and professional resources, ways of connecting to audience and community, and new models in dance for training, performing, creating, and sharing dance.

## PHYSICAL & PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

The Arizona Dance community currently has a digital means of gathering and sharing information through the Arizona Dance Coalition and the Arizona Commission on the Arts. These organizations serve as the key resources for the Metro-Phoenix Dance Community to stay informed about dance-related opportunities (i.e. classes, upcoming events and performances, and funding).

Within Metro-Phoenix there are physical venues that provide support and opportunities to show work, rehearse and/or hold meetings such as Mesa Arts Center, Phoenix Center for the Arts, the Phoenix Art Museum, and Tempe Center for the Arts. There are also smaller locally owned studios that provide space for teachers to hold classes and rehearsals such as Toolbox Studios.

There are other services and organizations that can support artists in professional development skills with business planning, communications, and marketing skills. Some of these supporting organizations include the Business Volunteers for the Arts, Lawyers for the Arts, Curator Engine, Arizona Commission on the Arts, PAVE Program in Arts Entrepreneurship, Creative Catalyst, and CO+Hoots.

**“I do many  
things that pay  
more so that I  
can do other  
things, and  
provide  
opportunities  
that aren’t paid”**

Carley Conder, Artistic Director of CONDER/dance

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Metro-Phoenix has a large and diverse population, and is home to many businesses and corporations. The breadth of the Metro-Phoenix population is a huge potential asset for funding opportunities. There are multiple opportunities for the dance community to connect with and influence potential audiences by introducing dance more broadly, and making it more accessible.

Dance artists have been able to support their artistic interests by creating work that reaches a wider range of audiences. Creating this work may not be as compelling for them as artists, but it influences the community to understand and better support dance as an art form. It provides funding opportunities for their artistic work, and generates new stakeholders and audience members for their other artistic work.



# “Big company models are really hierarchical, we need to think as more of a circle.”

Jamey Garner, Dance Artist, Educator, and MFA Candidate at Arizona State University



## REDEFINING MODELS FOR DANCE TRAINING & PRESENTATION

Because of time constraints and limited dance training opportunities, Dancers, choreographers, and company directors are re-defining the hierarchical model of traditional company structures, resources for training, and means of distributing their work. Choreographers are working collaboratively and focusing on multiple artistic voices in the creation of new work. This collective approach pivots artists from the scarcity mentality by sharing resources of time, administrative work, and also expanding audiences. Because of time constraints and a scarcity in dance training opportunities, dancers have become resourceful and are cross-training at yoga studios, learning circus arts, and joining cross-fit gyms.

Work is also being made that can transfer fluidly between different performance opportunities that allow the work to be shared on a wide range with a larger audience. Work is being created that can transfer between the theater and traditional performance spaces, large outdoor arts festivals (Spark! Festival and First Fridays), and non-traditional performance venues (empty lots, shipping containers, and bars).



# CHALLENGES FOR THE DANCE COMMUNITY

While many resources for the Metro-Phoenix Dance Community were identified, there are ongoing challenges that make it difficult to leverage them for the good of the overall community. These challenges included a lack of support for professional careers, competing events, scarcity of dancers, and difficulty gaining traction due to a lack of density in certain geographic areas. While there is an acknowledgement that these barriers exist, it was also noted that the community needs to remove themselves from a scarcity mentality, and consider what actions they can take now to remove or adapt to these barriers.

## UNBALANCED USE OF RESOURCES

There are many dance companies, projects, and classes that exist in Metro-Phoenix, and currently there is a limited number of professional dancers, funding opportunities, and invested stakeholders. Several dancers are working with multiple companies, juggling the demands of their rehearsal, training, and work schedule, and are not being adequately compensated for their work. There is also a lack of communication and planning of dance events between dance companies, organizations, and larger presenting organizations, which sometimes creates intense competition for audience members. This scarcity of resources is also reflected in a limited pool of board members, volunteers, and funding opportunities, and a lack of resources to recruit and train new stakeholders and active participants in the Dance Community.

## LACK OF SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL CAREERS

Presenting organizations have difficulty working with local artists who lack clear plans and business-oriented skills, and dance artists need more resources to build their professional skill sets to create business and marketing plans, and approach their artistic career realistically based on available resources.

Many dancers outside of university programs struggle to find affordable performance and rehearsal space. There is a strong desire for a dedicated dance space in Metro-Phoenix that is financially accessible to dance artists. Professional dancers are also looking for a venue where they can train in multiple dance genres with qualified teachers at an affordable rate. Models for this kind of space exists in other cities such as Gibney Dance Center in New York City and Velocity Dance Center in Seattle.

## LACK OF POPULATION DENSITY IN THE VALLEY

The diffused geography and breadth of the Metro-Phoenix area with 4 million residents in 9,000 square miles presents additional challenges to the dance community. Choreographers and company directors have difficulty reaching new audiences and recruiting and retaining professional dancers without population density. There is also a sense that it is difficult to gather large attendance numbers for classes and concerts because the distance between the Metro-Phoenix cities makes commuting undesirable.

**"There are tons of dance companies and only a few dancers. They don't take classes because they don't have time."**



# VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

DEVELOPED BY  
PARTICIPANTS OF THE  
PHOENIX DANCE CAFE



## DEVELOP SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DANCERS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS

- Create a regular professional dance class series that rotates teachers
- Create double-bill shows with other artists to share resources
- Support dancer health with equal time to spent between training and rehearsing
- Work towards consistent compensation for dancers and artists
- Develop a system of shared resources for the community such as a dance floor, sound and lighting equipment, administrative services, and rehearsal space
- Connect emerging artists with established artists for mentorship in artistic and administrative skills

## CREATE AN EASY TO NAVIGATE, ROBUST ONLINE RESOURCE FOR METRO-PHOENIX DANCE

- Develop a calendar listing of dance events, and features highlighting dance artists and events
- Maintain a list of professional dance classes
- Share videos of work-in-progress with peers for input and feedback
- Post full-length work that can be purchased by others to watch if they were not able to attend your event

## DEVELOP A CENTRAL HUB WITH SHARED RESOURCES

- A shared space for rehearsals, performances, meetings, and workshops
- Training in movement as well as business, creative, and community skills
- Support for healthy lifestyles and practices for dancers

## IMPROVE CONNECTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY

- Attend 1 class or event with a friend that is outside of the events you regularly attend
- Collaborate with disciplines, genres, community members outside of your own artistic form
- Reflect on experiences individually, and publicly with the community

# NEXT STEPS

Event attendees requested the creation of a Dance Cafe community Facebook group where they can connect with other event attendees and strategize for next steps and plans for action. Certain workshop attendees have expressed interest in participating in working groups dedicated to achieving some of the visions for the community outlined in this report. [nueBOX] staff will be initiating community meetings to develop action plans from the visions created during this meeting. Another Phoenix Dance Cafe gathering will take place in the next 3-6 months to continue connecting, collaborating, and planning.

This event summary will be shared and distributed with all workshop participants, community members who were unable to attend, schools that provide dance education, Metro-Phoenix presenting organizations, and through social media streams that will connect with the dance community. The report will also be permanently posted on the [nueBOX] website at [www.nuebox.org/dancecafe](http://www.nuebox.org/dancecafe).

## THANK YOU

This event would not have occurred without the generous support of Rosemarie Christofolo and Beth Schermer of Christofolo||Schermer Consulting. Together with [nueBOX] staff, Julie Akerly and Allyson Yoder, this event was created with influence from the Metro-Phoenix Dance Community. The Mesa Arts Center provided the space for this event, and continues to support [nueBOX] and the dance community through partnerships and programming. The Arizona Commission on the Arts also participated in coordinating this event, and provided annual funding to [nueBOX] which makes programming like the Phoenix Dance Cafe possible. Most importantly, the Metro-Phoenix Dance Community showed up in all of its diverse forms to contribute to this conversation. Thank you to everyone who put their time and energy into visioning the future of dance in Metro-Phoenix.

## IMAGE CREDITS

1. "Flow States" by Mary Fitzgerald, Jessica Rajko, and Casey Farina - photography by Dmitri Von Klein
2. CONDER/dance "Map of Broken Glass" - photography by Carlos Arturo Velarde
3. Phoenix Dance Cafe - photography by Jasmine Wilson
4. Jasmine Nunn "Grey Matter" - photography by Rowan Burkham
5. Grey Box Collective "It's Not that Simple" - photography by Justin Russell
6. [nueBOX] Workshop - photography by Jasmine Wilson
7. Phoenix Dance Cafe - photography by Jasmine Wilson