



Life After Dance

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Dancers' Career Development (DCD) provides support for dancers who are considering what to do with their lives once their performing careers draw to a close. Anja Dobler, from DCD discusses the help available to dancers when looking at the possibilities for their future.

Dancing is more than just a job. For most professional dancers, her or his career goes far beyond work and can define lives. It is no secret that the physical pressures, competition, funding gaps and intensity of dance can also make it an erratic and often comparatively short career. Yet 'life after dance' is a relatively overlooked issue. Few other professions create such a strong personal identity for the

performer. Practitioners 'become' dancers at a relatively young age, with other interests rarely encouraged as they might distract from the total commitment and passion the dance profession requires. Therefore it comes as no surprise that many dancers do not think about what will happen when dancing ends and can be deeply affected by the sudden gap in their lives.

This gap, the interruption of a dancing career through injury or illness, or through gaps in employment; or the permanent end of the performing part of a dancers' life; often happens at a point when most other professionals are just entering their productive professional careers. In the late 20's or early 30's most adults have made many commitments in their lives, are considering a mortgage or children, yet for dancers this is also most often the period when injury problems occur, employment opportunities become scarce and it becomes apparent, often for the first time in their lives, that dancing may not be a life-long career choice.

The UK was the first country worldwide to acknowledge 33 years ago that in dance, career transition is inevitable, therefore an integral part of a dancers' life and that dancers needed specialised support to help them through the challenging period of professional re-orientation. Dancers' Career Development (DCD) was founded, under the name Dancers Resettlement Fund, in 1974 with the aim to offer emotional, practical and financial support to dancers at the end of their performing careers. Since then thousands of UK dancers from all professional backgrounds have sought retraining support from the organisation, have successfully retrained into hundreds of different post-performing careers, and crucially other countries, namely Canada, the USA, the Netherlands and recently Switzerland, have founded national retraining centres based on DCD's blueprint.

But why do dancers require specialised retraining advice and support aside from government job centres and in-company Continuous Professional Development projects?

"Thank goodness there is this much needed support for dancers. So much more informed than government departments about retraining."

This quote by a former independent dancer is far from unusual. Official job centres are often ill-prepared to deal with dancers, who are highly trained, highly skilled and successful individuals, with more than half their working life still in front of them, yet unable, for one reason or other, to continue performing as a dancer. 'To teach dance instead' is the advice most commonly given to those seeking advice at a job centre, but where to gain the necessary qualifications and insurances or what to do if teaching just isn't a satisfying career move? Or who should a dancer turn to, who is unfortunate enough to sustain a career ending injury and is suffering severely from the emotional impact this has on her or his life? And finally, even if a dancer has clear post-performing career goals, how will he or she afford the often considerable training costs, when only very few dancers have been able to build up necessary savings?

"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."⁽¹⁾

Dancers' Career Development has many years of specialised experience to help dancers with all these questions. Its

services focus on three vital support requirements: Emotional and psychological support by a qualified and experienced counsellor; educational and practical support to help making individual and informed career development choices, and last but not least retraining and business start-up grants for eligible (2.) professional dancers. The organisation is also prepared to encounter the more hidden aspects of dancer career transition such as the stigma attached to re-orientation, which is often regarded by the performers themselves or their employers as lack of commitment to dance and might therefore have a negative impact on their current dancing careers. Or the question how and where to find the right training provider to allow for a smooth transition into a successful and fulfilling career off-stage.

All of DCD's retraining support services are free of charge, dancer-driven and crucially all contact with the organisation is confidential. Whilst DCD can offer a careers library and information material from a wide range of training providers and help to network applicants to other already retrained dancers, it is strictly independent and not associated with one training provider over another. And finally and importantly all dancers seeking advice are treated as individuals and given the required amount of support rather than being overwhelmed (or underwhelmed) by a 'one-fits-all' approach.

An important fact is that all dancers are welcome to contact DCD at any stage of their career, whether they are working in, or training in professional

dance, or have already retired from active dancing, it is never too late or too early to start thinking about how to manage what comes after performing. This means that dancers can also take the option to retrain in a complementary second career (i.e. fitness training or massage) whilst still actively performing to support their dancing careers or to bridge employment gaps. Often this is a vital element in sustaining a volatile performing career and helping dancers to remain in the profession for longer.

Former dancers who have retrained back into the dance profession with DCD's support can be found in nearly all UK dance organisations, companies and schools as well as in many international dance bodies. They make a major contribution to dance world as teachers, notators, choreographers, arts administrators and managers or artistic directors. Many more remain associated with the dance profession by choosing related careers in stage design, dance photography and film, physical therapies or fitness training for dancers. Often dancers retain their identity as a dancer for life and can be found describing themselves as "a dancer who is now a Pilates teacher".

However there is also a large number of dancers who decide to move into a completely new professional field. The range of careers chosen by these dancers is fascinating and surprisingly wide ranging and enterprising. Yet DCD's many years of experience also means that dancers are, sometimes to their disappointment but more often encouragingly, rarely 'the first' to enter a new career path and the organisa-

tions' alumni includes, amongst others, architects, plumbers, lawyers, scuba diving instructors, pilots, accountants and even an animal behaviourist.

Dancers' Career Development's statistics show that 34% of all retrained independent dancers choose a career in the dance sector and another 21% decide to move into a career in another art form. Contrastingly a recent DCD survey shows that a substantial 75% of all retrained dancers consider their current profession to be within, supporting or associated with the dance profession - an assessment, which is both encouraging for the dance sector but also proving the strong aforementioned dancer identity.

What all retrained dancers have in common, whether or not they choose to work inside or outside the dance profession, is exceptional success in their second careers. This is in stark contrast to the self assessment of many dancers, who seek support from DCD, worried because they feel they 'don't know anything but how to dance'. Mindy Levine observes in her study *Beyond Performance*,

"Dance training, as has been pointed out in many research studies, leaves dancers with an extraordinary array of skills that are highly valued in the workplace, but often too little understood both by the dancers themselves and by potential employers. Psychologists and career counsellors have identified the following career attributes as especially valuable for a dancer's workplace marketability: communication skills, competitiveness, cooperation, leadership, personal presentation, physical

self-confidence, mental and physical dexterity, self discipline, stamina/persistence, creative problem-solving, time management." (3.)

Furthermore DCD's own research shows that retrained dancers are not only sought after employees, they are frequently prepared to take the risk and start up their own businesses, with outstanding success. Such businesses include Pilates and Gyrotonic studios, fashion stores, flower shops, B&B's and a stonemasonry to name but a few and often these ex-dancer-founded businesses help other dancers' post-dancing careers by offering them employment.

Encouragingly DCD's survey further reveals that 89% of all the hundreds of dancers who have retrained with the organisation's support are still employed in the career they originally retrained for, a further 92% firmly believe that their retraining helped them to find their current employment and only 2% are currently unemployed.

The other international transition centres can boast similarly positive success rates as regular meetings and conferences of the International Organisation for the Transition of Professional Dancers (IOTPD), of which DCD is a founding member, can prove. The IOTPD was formed in 1993 in Lausanne, Switzerland with a mission to alleviate the challenges that professional dancers face worldwide when transitioning to a post-dance career. International collaboration is vital since dance, like almost no other profession, is considered a 'universal language' with the result that its performers are extremely mobile and often perform in

various countries and even continents during their careers.

Unfortunately the support level for these international performers still varies widely from country to country, as do each transition centres' guidelines and eligibility criteria, making international collaboration fraught with difficulty, the centres work together in supporting international performers where possible.

A UK/Dutch collaboration agreement is currently in the final stages of negotiations. The agreement will allow eligible dancers to add up the years they have performed in either country in order to achieve eligibility for funding. Though these are still only initial steps, the founding of new international dancer transition centres in Switzerland and soon in Germany allows for a positive outlook for the future.

"As a contemporary dancer, much of my development was focused on overcoming lack; lack of money, funds, studio-space, performing opportunities. DCD offers another prototype, one based on possibility and support from the outset." (independent dancer)

All dancers, from which ever dancing background, are welcome to contact Dancers' Career Development at any stage of their professional careers. The organisation also offers company or production workshops to inform about its services and career options available.

ANJA DOBLER, DANCERS' CAREER DEVELOPMENT, DECEMBER 2007

1. W. Baumol, J. Jeffri, D. Throsby: Making Changes; Facilitating the Transition of Dancers to Post-Performance Careers, 2004.

2. DCD eligibility guidelines state that in order to apply for funding from the organisation a dancer has to have performed a minimum of 8 years as a professional dancer with a minimum of 5 years of those performed in the UK. Further rules apply, for more information see www.thedcd.org.uk

3. M. Levine: Beyond Performance, Building a better future for dancers and the art of dance, aDVANCE Project, 2005

For further information, careers advice and eligibility guidelines contact:

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International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers

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DCD

freshly squeezed...

Staff changes...

This month we welcome Sandra Castell Garcia who will be undertaking a work placement within the Theatre and Artist Development teams until May 2008.

Anna Scott is expecting her third baby in the new year and will be going on maternity leave in January. Good luck with the new baby Anna!

Updated factsheets...

The *Key Contacts in Europe* factsheet and the *Dance Film Festivals & Resources* factsheet have now been updated. To request a copy please contact:

Artist Development
T: +44 (0) 20 7121 1040
artistdevelopment@theplace.org.uk

why don't you...

Attend Resolution! 2008...

Resolution! the UK's longest running dance platform presents original work from new choreographers and returning artists. Between 3 January-23 February each night will feature a triple bill of new works and Friday and Saturday night performances from 18 January will include choreography from Europe as part of Aerowaves, the international strand of Resolution!

For the full Resolution! programme or to book tickets contact/visit:
The Place Box Office
T: +44 (0) 20 7121 1100
www.theplace.org.uk