

National Dance Project

New England Regional Dance Development Initiative

Summary for Participants

Background

The New England Foundation for the Arts' Regional Dance Development Initiative (RDDI) was created in 2004 as a pilot project. The initiative was designed through ongoing communication with colleagues in the field that revealed a need to improve vital regional networks to foster exchange and growth opportunities for emerging artists. Leading dance presenters, artists, funders and dance service organizations were asked to brainstorm new methods to support and ensure the longevity of dance beyond the traditional areas of creation, management, presentation and touring. RDDI was designed to maximize local and regional support for emerging artists by catalyzing existing resources and redefining the relationship between artist and presenter. By design, the initiative has a defined beginning and end, with the intent of building connections and relationships that will continue to nourish the dance communities in which the initiatives take place.

To date, NEFA has hosted Regional Dance Development Initiatives to serve the dance communities of the Pacific North West, the Bay Area, and New England. The New England initiative took place in July/August of 2007, followed by a series of seven exchanges for dance in spring of 2008.

Each lab, an intense week or so of sharing and discussing work with peers and mentors, followed a structure developed by the National Dance Project (NDP) and was supported by regional funders (foundations, corporate and individuals). For each RDDI, NDP worked with regional advisors and coordinators to tailor the initiative to meet the unique needs and concerns of the dance community in which it was held. Projects are continuing in each community from the relationships and networks started through RDDI, including residency projects, regional touring, resource sharing and other collaborative initiatives within the regional dance communities.

Goals

Through the RDDI, NEFA engages local partners to develop and implement regional dance projects, each oriented around a community in which there is a concentration of dance activity. RDDI projects focus on providing professional development for choreographers and dancers. Artists work alongside mentors to assist them in:

- articulating work
- improving stagecraft
- improving marketing and contextual materials
- engaging in critical discourse strategies

NEFA seeks to better understand the needs and potential support systems for emerging contemporary dance artists and their communities, and to share this information with other communities in the region and nation. RDDI helps artists reach new markets by improving their ability to communicate with audiences about the meaning of and context for their work and by developing their relationships with dance presenters. RDDI strives

to strengthen local and regional connections for dance and to help choreographers reach their individual professional goals.

New England RDDI

The New England RDDI (also called the New England Dance Lab) took place at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, from July 27 to August 4, 2007.

Twelve artists were selected by a national panel from 30 applicants throughout New England. The artists were selected primarily for artistic quality of their work as well as the potential for the lab format to enhance their careers and goals. The artists worked with seven mentors on the articulation of their work and how to build relationships with presenters. 32 presenters attended the final two days for a presenter roundtable.



The Lab Artists came from five of the six New England States and worked in dance forms, including tap, Bharatanatyam, modern, installation and mixed media or digital formats. The group included solo artists as well as artistic directors of companies and artists who primarily work in collaborative contexts.

Lab artists: Nell Breyer, solo artist (Somerville, MA); Alissa Cardone and Ingrid Schatz, Kinodance Company (Somerville, MA); Lorraine Chapman, Lorraine Chapman, The Company (LCTC) (Winchester, MA); Selene Colburn, solo artist (Hinesburg, VT); Talya Epstein, solo artist (Boston, MA); Bronwen MacArthur, MacArthur Dance Project (New Haven, CT); Polly Motley, solo artist (Stowe, VT); Dahlia Nayar, Takademi (Northampton, MA); Drika Overton, solo artist & Portsmouth Percussive Dance Festival (Portsmouth, NH/Kittery, ME); Candice Salyer, solo artist (Northampton, MA); Aparna Sindhoor, Navarasa Dance Theater (Somerville, MA); Adele Myers, Adele Myers and Dancers (Hamden, CT).

The lab mentors were chosen to represent wide ranging expertise as dance artists, presenters, and agents with national perspectives.

Barbara Bryan, Dance Program Director for Lexington Center for The Arts and Curator for Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival's Inside/Out Series.

Donald Byrd, Artistic Director of Spectrum Dance Theater in Seattle, formerly the Artistic Director of DONALD BYRD/THE GROUP.

Terry Creach, co-director of Creach/Company, and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Dance at Bennington College.

Peter DiMuro, director of Dance/Metro DC a branch of Dance/USA

Joan Gray, President of the Muntu Dance Theatre in Chicago.

Barbara Ally, Associate Director of the Center for the Arts at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.

Mary Chapin Durling, Cultural Affairs Coordinator for Fitchburg State College, served as the Project Coordinator for the Dance lab.

Artist response to the lab experience:

I was amazed by the rigor of the mentors, and the very unexpected level of camaraderie I felt between the artists. I feel more confident about the legitimacy and relevance of my work in the realm of contemporary dance. The lab empowered me to

pursue my vision, and encouraged me to take measures to invest in my artistry.
Dahlia Nayar, Lab Artist

There were several valuable aspects to the overall experience: important, practical advice; valuable artistic feedback; introductions to other New England colleagues / artists' works; opportunity to meet mentors, presenters and curators who attended some or all of the Lab; opportunity to create new work, perform new work and begin collaborations for new work; a chance to try to articulate my personal and professional goals in the arena of dance and to think practically (with outside feedback) about how to obtain these.

Nell Breyer, Lab Artist

Exchange Series for Dance

Following the New England Dance Lab, NDP embarked on a series of seven gatherings held throughout the New England region. The goals of this Exchange Series for Dance were:

- Regional networking to connect the diverse and often isolated members of the New England dance scene, including building bridges between the dance artist and presenters of dance.
- Raise the visibility of the lab artists and give them opportunities to show their work, build relationships with regional presenters, and share their learning with the broader field of dance artists in New England.
- Begin dialogue on issues of relevance to each host site and gather information about the needs and interests of the field to plan next steps in promoting and nurturing the region's dance ecology.



The cumulative attendance to the series totaled more than 270; 41% dance artists and 29% presenters. Other attendees included state arts agencies, funders, dance photographers, lighting designers, musicians, and film-makers, as well as dance educators and students from all sectors including private studio, public schools and college or university programs.

Each exchange was a free one- or two-day event that included performances by lab artists. The exchanges, planned by a selected group of key players in a given region, were individualized to match the needs and desires of that locale. NEFA collaborated with host organizers in each area. The seven exchanges were:

Lewiston, ME: Franco-American Cultural Center/Bates College, March 9-10

The Franco-American Heritage Center and Bates College presented the third annual FAB (Franco-American Bates) Dance Concert on March 9 in Lewiston, Maine. In addition to featuring Maine dance artists (Sasha Randall, Ann Dubensky, Jump Cannon Collective, Parakilas, and Dilley & Eng), FAB organizers collaborated with NEFA and included four artists selected through the New England dance lab: Alissa Cardone/Kinodance, Bronwen MacArthur/MacArthur Dance Project, Drika Overton/Jazz Tap Ensemble, and Adele

Myers/Adele Myers and Dancers. With the works seen at the FAB concert as a basis for discussion, 53 artists, presenters, and others with an interest in dance gathered for a full day of networking and exchange of ideas on the **topics of Context and Collaboration:**

- exploring strategies to contextualize work to broaden audiences and deepen impact
- thinking outside the box about ways to leverage regional artists through the support systems for national artists

The feedback I received from the event was 1) very rare to find in places like Maine, and 2) a bang-for-my-buck networking experience...my group was very starved for the feedback and professional development...Also, there is a very small dance community in Maine, and it's always hard to have everyone in one place at one time. That was actualized at the event, and it gave us time to catch up with other Maine colleagues.
—a Maine dance artist



The Maine exchange for dance was supported through the efforts of planning partners Aimee Petrin (PCA Great Performances), Carol Dilley (Bates College), Donna McNeil (Maine Arts Commission), Laura Faure (Bates Dance Festival), and Nancy Salmon (Bates Dance Festival).

Southern NH/ VT: Marlboro College, Brattleboro VT, March 18-19

The Vermont Performance Lab collaborated with NEFA in arranging to have Marlboro College host the Southern VT Exchange for Dance. The RDDI artists who performed included: Adele Myers/Adele Myers and Dancers, Lorraine Chapman, Candice Salyers, Selene Colburn, Drika Overton, as well as invited guest artist Yasuko Yokoshi from New York who shared a film about a long term residency-based project she was completing in the Brattleboro area. The topic for the exchange was using New England's wealth of educational institutions in service of **a touring circuit of high-school and college regional dance artists:**

- making use of facilities for bartered exchange
- developing the potential for interdisciplinary work for regional artists within academic settings

I like to step out of my every day to meet other colleagues and have an opportunity to relate across the field and disciplines. This event is one opportunity for dialogue and meeting new people or to deepen my relationships with familiar faces that I do not yet know so well or whom I will work with more closely in the future. I so appreciate that NEFA spearheads these gatherings and I hope to attend more like it over the years.
—a Marlboro Exchange Participant



The Marlboro, VT exchange for dance was supported through the efforts of planning partners Sara Coffey (Vermont Performance Lab), Bill Menezes (Redfern Arts Center, Keene State College), Marcia Murdock (Keene State College), Kristen Horrigan (Marlboro College), Alison Mott (Brattleboro School of Dance and Career Center), Kayla Yanatos (Putney School), Audrey Levin McLaughlin (Marlboro College), Ellen McCulloch-Lovell (Marlboro College), Judy Rigmont (New Hampshire State Council on the Arts), Michele

Bailey (Vermont Arts Council), Liza Sacheli (Middlebury College/ Arts Presenters of Northern New England).

Western MA: MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, March 31-April 1

A two-day exchange for dance in North Adams, MA, explored the topics of non-traditional spaces for dance. More than 35 people attended the exchange including 12 artists and 16 presenters. A special evening session of open rehearsals brought students from Bennington College to meet the lab artists, see their current work, and ask questions. The exchange featured performances by Nell Breyer, Candice Salyers, Polly Motley, and Dahlia Nayar. Using MASS MoCA's multi-disciplinary space as a catalyst for discussion, the topic of **Non Traditional Spaces for Dance** was explored:



- Using MASS MoCA's multi-disciplinary space as a catalyst for discussion, topics of site-specific dance and dance designed to be viewed in contexts apart from the proscenium stage will be explored

The exchange series was very helpful on two levels for me: 1) to see the possibilities of my work in alternative spaces such as MassMoca 2) To receive feedback (both on my work and also on the topic of alternative spaces) from arts presenters, faculty and the other attendees. The series provided a rare opportunity for dialogue between artists and presenters...which at times was quite challenging! But it encouraged me to continue to find ways to communicate/articulate/connect. It was also a great reminder of the unique institutional resources available in New England as we had attendees from Jacob's Pillow, Rensaaler, and, of course, MASSMoCA.

-Dahlia Nayar, Lab Artist

The MASS MoCA exchange for dance was supported through the efforts of planning partners Terese Freedman (Mt. Holyoke College), Jim Coleman (Mt. Holyoke college), Ranjanaa Devi (UMass Amherst), David Hurwith (dance artist), Kathryn Maguet (UMass Amherst), Sue Killam (MASS MoCA), Sandra Burton (Williams College), Randal Fippinger (Williams College).

Providence, RI: Perishable Theater, Providence, RI, April 13

In collaboration with the Native Arts @ NEFA Program, the exchange for dance explored the topic of presenting Native American Dance. The exchange brought together over 40 individuals including Native artists, presenters, state arts council and tribal government, educators, and students. After viewing dance and song performances by Eleanor & Thawn Harris (Narragansett), the Wampanoag Nation Singers & Dancers, as well as Albert Zamora (Mashantucket) and Althnageebah Myles (Navajo/Mohegan), the attendees engaged in a wide ranging discussion. As a reference point for the discussion of the complexity of "contemporary" dance work within traditional contexts, attendees also viewed excerpts of Joan Frosch's film, *Movement (R)evolution Africa*, on the contemporary dance movement for African Artists and heard first-hand from lab artist Aparna Sindhoor about her challenges creating contemporary work within the traditional context of her Bhartanatyam training. The exchange engaged Native American dance artists in



dialogue with presenters around **opportunities and contexts for regional Native dance artists to present work.**

- Engaging Native American dance artists in dialogue with presenters and dance artists of other forms around opportunities and contexts for regional Native dance artists to present work

Having the opportunity to focus a conversation solely on Native American dance is quite significant for the New England Native communities- being able to talk about the different styles of dance from the more traditional dance styles to the more contemporary pow wow styles and then to a more professional or theatrical presentation. Most important was to have the opportunity to address these differences; being able to encourage this type of expression is tremendous.

-Dawn Spears, Native Arts Coordinator, NEFA

The Rhode Island exchange for dance was supported through the efforts of planning partners Dawn Spears (Native Arts@NEFA) and Winnie Lambrecht (Rhode Island State Council on the Arts).

Northern VT & NH: St. Johnsbury Academy, St. Johnsbury, VT, May 13

Held in conjunction with "Extending the Dance Map: A Northern New England Rural Dance Project," a partnership providing professional development for dance artists interested in working in public schools and encouraging integration of dance into the curriculum of rural schools in New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont, the exchange focused on how to encourage performance opportunities for regional artists in rural areas. The day, attended by 35 artists, students, presenters, studio owners, teachers and arts administrators, included showings by lab artists Lorraine Chapman, Aparna Sindhoor, and Selene Colburn. Participants were guided on a walking tour of the town of St. Johnsbury to explore alternative community sites for presenting dance, followed by a facilitated discussion and open exchange on rural dance issues. A special evening session, including 24 local dance students and artists, showcased rural Vermont and New Hampshire dance artists. The exchange focused on the topic ***Dance in the Rural Setting:***

- presented in cooperation with Extending the Dance Map: A Northern New England Rural Dance Initiative
- focus on how to encourage performance opportunities for regional artists in rural areas

This event allowed me to have a better understand of the diversity of work that is happening and feasible in this area as well as the need for all of us to be open to work and ideas different from our own. This event allowed me to meet face-to-face a number of people I had been communicating with primarily through e-mail, which is very critical in these more rural areas. These face to face meetings deepen commitment to each other.

-St. Johnsbury Exchange Participant

The St. Johnsbury Academy exchange for dance was supported through the efforts of planning partners Frumie Selchen (Arts Alliance Northern New Hampshire), Diane Hulse (Arts Alliance Northern New Hampshire), Selene Colburn (RDDI Artist), Ford Evans (Dartmouth College), Polly Motley (RDDI artist), Carole Morrison (Friends of the Arts), Lisa Travis (Plymouth State University), Amanda Whitworth (Plymouth State University), and Marianne Handy Hraibi (St. Johnsbury Academy).



Eastern MA: Summer Stages/Concord Academy, Concord, MA, June 2-3

A two-day exchange for dance took place at Concord Academy, hosted by the Summer Stages Dance Program. The exchange explored the work of regional dance artists by providing opportunities to see and discuss regional dance work with colleagues in a relaxed setting. 47 attendees included artists, presenters, students, educators and arts administrators and featured informal performances by lab artists Adele Meyers, Polly Motley, Talya Epstein, Aparna Sindhoo, and Bronwen MacArthur. Facilitated discussions focused on **commissioning and touring work of regional dance artists:**



- developing a circuit to provide long-term residencies for the commissioning of new work by regional artists
- engaging strategies to provide peer to peer feedback during the creative process

The RDDI has done nothing less than to change my thinking about dance making in New England!

-Richard Colton, Co-Director, Summer Stages at Concord Academy

The Concord Academy exchange for dance was supported through the efforts of planning partners Richard Colton and Amy Spencer (Summer Stages at Concord Academy) Ruth Birnberg (Boston Dance Alliance), Debra Cash (dance writer), Lance Olson (Emerson College), Patricia Ramaciotti (Crash Arts), Joe Zina (Coolidge Corner Theater), Karen Brown (Celebrity Series), Drika Overton (Lab artist), Kelly Bennett (MCC), Mary Chapin Durling (Fitchburg State College).

New Haven, CT: Festival of Arts and Ideas, ACES Theater, June 24-25

A two-day event in New Haven, CT annexed to the International Festival of Arts and Ideas, this exchange explored the work of regional dance artists. The exchange included performances by lab artists Nell Breyer and Kinodance, as well as four selected CT artists: Adam Miller, Deborah Goffe/Scapegoat Garden, NoeMarch Dance, and Lisa Race. 34 people attended this exchange including artists, presenters, students, dance educators, and administrators. Conversation focused on **alternative formats for presenting and presenting in the virtual world.** Specific attention was given to:



- the growing use of technology in the work of regional artists
- the potential and challenges of interdisciplinary work.

The New Haven, CT exchange for dance is annexed to the International Festival of Arts and Ideas and was supported through the efforts of Festival Staff including Cathy Edwards, Melissa Huber, Denise Santisteban, Liz Fisher and Kat West. The exchange series in CT was also supported through the efforts of planning partners Cathy Edwards, International Festival of Arts & Ideas; An-Ming Truxes, CT Commission on Culture and Tourism; Barbara Ally, Wesleyan University; Rob Richter, CT College; Bronwen MacArthur, Lab artist; Adam Miller, Adam Miller Dance Project; Jill Henderson Pasanen,

CT Dance Alliance; Sister Nandi and Sister Anyong, Sankofa Kuumba Cultural Arts Consortium; Andria Matthews, International Festival of Arts & Ideas.

The Results: Outcomes & Ripple Effects

One of the most important outcomes, yet most difficult to articulate, is the strong connections made between artists and presenters during the lab and subsequent exchanges. These relationships have developed into collaborations that lead to proposals for NEFA's Expeditions program, to NDP, or other grantmaking programs. Other outcomes include:

First New England Regional Artist Residency at Bates Dance Festival

Laura Faure of the Bates Dance Festival was inspired by the Exchanges, and proposed the first New England Artist Residency at the Bates Dance Festival, with support from NDP. Lab artist Candice Salyers was selected as the first Artist in Residence. As a visiting artist, Candice took three daily classes, had daily studio spaces, had the opportunity to work with festival dancers if so desired, and performed on one of the weekly studio showings. The Festival provided her with meals, housing, administrative support and documentation for the duration of the residency. As a result of this experience, Candice met Victoria Marks and was asked to join Marks to perform in her work "Not about Iraq" on tour in Montana and Minnesota in Fall of 2008.

RDDI Sends New England Presenters to Jacob's Pillow's Leadership Forum

In an on-going commitment to providing dance specific professional development opportunities for New England presenters, NEFA's RDDI program provides funding to cover the costs of two New England presenters attending the leadership forum at Jacob's Pillow. Participants must have five years of experience presenting dance exclusively or presenting dance within a multi-disciplinary context, and be the staff person responsible for dance programming decisions and possess a strong commitment to presenting dance within their institutions.

Participants immerse themselves in dance at Jacob's Pillow during a four-day Forum, discussing the art of dance; examining curatorial issues, field-wide issues and participants' own communities; and connecting with colleagues. Participants also attend performances at the international Festival, tour the Pillow's Archives and National Historic Landmark grounds, observe dance classes, and enjoy the incomparable environment of the Pillow.

A Model Collaboration: Moving Towards the Establishment of a Creative Residency Touring Circuit in New England

Summer Stages' Richard Colton, inspired by his experience at the RDDI showings at Connecticut College, initiated a creative residency for four RDDI artists: choreographer/media artist Nell Breyer, and dancers/choreographers Alissa Cardone, Lorraine Chapman and Bronwen MacArthur. Colton explains, "They are collaborating to create a new work that is a natural extension of the artistic exchanges that took place during the New England Foundation for the Arts Regional Dance Development Initiative. The work explores crossover between each artist's individual movement language, media and aesthetics."

Through introductions made at the RDDI exchanges, Sarah Coffey of Vermont Performance Lab, Jim Coleman of the Five College Dance Department in Amherst, MA, and Sandra Burton at Williams College have all come together to offer this project a series of four creative development residencies through which the piece can be completed and ready for presentation or touring in the following season. This exciting

collaboration may mark the beginning of a network of like-minded presenters with interests in cultivating new work by New England artists through the establishment of an on-going Creative Residency Touring Circuit.

The RDDI program has generated enthusiasm for regional dance artists throughout New England. Organizations and individuals involved in the exchanges have carried forward the momentum and are planning additional events. The following represent some of the ripple effects from the RDDI program:

- In March 2009, Wesleyan University presented a regional artist showing to highlight the most innovative, creative work being developed in New England and included it in DanceMasters Weekend, which has become one of the most highly anticipated dance events in the region. The showcase was made possible by a grant from the New England Foundation for the Arts.
- In May 2009, the Flynn Center for the Arts in Burlington Vermont will present a regional artists showcase and discussion. The showcase will feature several RDDI artists and will be funded in part through NEFA.
- With planning beginning in 2009, the CT Dance Alliance will host a CT Dance lab modeled on the RDDI with consultation from NEFA.

What's Next

Continuing the goals of the National Dance Project, discussions are taking place to plan the fifth RDDI in another region around the country. The location requires a certain concentration of artists and funders, and a demonstrated need for the initiative. The RDDI model has drawn interest from multiple metropolitan areas.

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Photos Credits

Pg. 2: Dancers, mentors, NDP staff at the CT dance lab; photo courtesy of NEFA.
Pg. 3, top: Lunch at the St. Johnsbury, VT, exchange; photo by Adrienne Petrillo.
Pg. 3, bottom: Adele Myers and Dancers; photo by Arthur Fink.
Pg. 4: Lorraine Chapman at the Marlboro College exchange; photo by Abigail Baisas.
Pg. 5: top: Polly Motley at the MASS MoCA exchange; photo by Ann Wicks.
Pg. 5, bottom: Thawn Harris at the Providence exchange, photo by Ann Wicks.
Pg. 6: Selene Colburn at the St. Johnsbury exchange; photo by Abigail Baisas.
Pg. 7, top: Aparna Sindhoor at the Eastern MA exchange; photo by Arthur Fink.
Pg. 7, bottom: Group discussion at the New Haven exchange; photo by Adrienne Petrillo.