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Establishing Cultural Identity in American Concert Dance: How Corporate Funding Can Revitalize the World of Dance

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Establishing Cultural Identity in American Concert Dance:
How corporate funding can revitalize the world of dance

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Honors Thesis

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Abstract:

In a country that has rapidly evolved in many industries, it has always mystified me as to why advancement in the arts, specifically dance, has lagged behind. My hypothesis as to why this is occurring is that concert dance in America is not as synonymous to the cultural identity of the nation as it is in comparison to its European ancestors. I began my research with the creation of ballet in order to determine the cultural roots that were established within particular societies. I then compared the funding models between the nations with this deep attachment to the funding models of our country. After making the comparison, it was evidently clear that the difference lies within our economic structure. America being capitalistic and the European nations being socialist, the state can only have so much influence in its contributions to the companies. I also realized that the companies, being primarily nonprofit institutions, are not fully utilizing their resources. I then proposed that the only way to establish the cultural identity of concert dance within America is to do what America does best: establish corporate sponsorships. By understanding the current sports marketing, advertising, and sponsorship tactics being utilized by major corporations, I proposed the same tactics be used for concert dance companies. The financial risks would then be lifted from the companies whose sole purposes should be to create meaningful art. One way to fully test the effectiveness of this method would be a corporate sponsorship of a small dance company to see how it affects its growth. Because major companies have already established a rapport with its community, the effectiveness of the tactics would not be as apparent. After its effectiveness is evaluated, corporations could see the potential benefits of associating their brand with the brand of a cultural institution.

Table of Contents:

Background

Government Contributions

Foreign Funding for Dance

Understanding Audiences

Corporate Sponsorship

Existing model within Sports

Proposed Sponsorship of Dance

Potential Problems

Conclusion

Bibliography

Background:

Dance as we know it has evolved over centuries into its present construct. It has always been foremost a form of entertainment. Ballet in specific served a different purpose centuries ago than it does today. When Catherine de Medici of Florence married King Henri II of France in 1533, the two cultures married as well; thus spawning a cataclysmic culture shock. The French prided themselves on the traditions of masquerades, and the Italians prided themselves on elaborate dances involving torches, fireworks, and other extravagant spectacles (Homans 3-4). Although the grandeur of the events may seem excessive on the surface, these events and performances served a much larger purpose. Throughout her reign, violence and civil unrest became the norm. Catherine de Medici played a significant role in the the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, but she attempted to mask the atrocious acts with beautiful art. Catherine de Medici saw the grand performances as "an important political tool, assuaging tensions and pacifying warring parties (Homans 5). This signifies the cultural importance that ballet consistently provides— even at its earliest form. With the formalization of dance and ballet beginning, an Academy was created by Charles XIV in 1570. It was called the Académie de Poésie et de Musique. It was the sole goal of the academy to a spectacle that "would harmonize dance, music, and language into a measured whole (Homans 5)." The significance of performance, and what would later become ballet, was being realized. The overall purpose was to entertain, but it also made men realize that "music and art could summon men to their highest capacities and goals (Homans 5)." It was no longer seen as just a senseless act of movement. It

was something that resonated on a spiritual level. It was through dance that “man might break some of these earthly ties and raise himself up, closer to the angels (Homans 6).”

Later on in its evolution, ballet served another purpose as a cultural institution. When Louis XIV came into power, he required all members of his court to be studied in ballet. He created the Royal Academy of Dance in 1661 to ensure that all members were well versed with the primary objective being “to restore the art of dancing to its first perfection (Homans 15). While they may not have been doing the same movement vocabulary as dancers perform today, they laid the foundation of what would transform into ballet’s current form. The five positions of the feet in ballet were created so that a member of the court could respectfully move around in the presence of the king.

It is abundantly clear that since the creation of ballet, it has been deeply rooted in becoming synonymous with cultural identity. Seeing the cultural identity that the French established with the formalization of ballet, Russia took it one step further. Peter the Great idealized western culture, and imposed it upon his subjects. One of the elements that he brought into Russia was ballet. The Russians used the aesthetics of ballet to uniquely define their society and culture. Russian ballets used choreographic formations that mimicked militaristic formations and the precise execution of movement to showcase their ominous presence as a nation. “Russian ballets featured full-scale battles, staged with the help of military experts (and hundreds of extras) with “troops” of dancers in rigid lines and arrayed in symmetrical formations (Homans 249).” Ballet for the Russians was, and still is, an artistic expression of nationalism. Ballet was more than art, and more than a defining characteristic their culture. The ultimate goal was to make ballet distinctively Russian. With such an importance placed on cultural identity and

nationalism, the creation of several masterpieces were prompted. Such masterpieces include: Sleeping Beauty, The Nutcracker, Swan Lake, Giselle, and La Bayadère. The first three ballets mentioned above, created by Marius Petipa, were also composed by the same person: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. This reaffirms the construct that the French laid out upon creating that first academy. The harmonious blend of dance could elevate man to a higher level.

In an effort to artistically establish a cultural identity, many nations followed in suit of the French, Russians, and Italians. State ballet companies were created throughout Europe. Dance became synonymous with cultural identity and expression. Although people may not speak the same language, the language of movement is universal. Many nations saw ballet as an opportunity to spread their culture, values, and ideals. With the natural evolution and progression of dance over a period of centuries, other styles of dance were created to further the cultural dialogue. With the spawn of modern, and later contemporary, dance, people saw dance as a way to record the social climate of the times. Modern dance was created as a reaction to dance. Post-modern dance was created as an extreme response to what dance could be. Although these genres of dance may differ in aesthetics, techniques, and vocabulary, they all share one common ancestor: ballet.

With such a heavy influence placed on the cultural identity that dance provides, dance is not necessarily viewed that way as a whole in America. Based on the foundation of capitalism, America often views dance purely as a form of entertainment. No blame can be placed on American society for that. America prides itself on being a melting pot of cultures. To define American culture without acknowledging the presence of other cultures within our own would be erroneous. To some extent dance is entertainment. America has turned dance into a product that

can be sold. The commercialization of dance dilutes the grander purpose that it should serve. It did not necessarily have to end up that way. America has never had a state funded ballet, nor will it ever. Modern American society views dance as an enterprise that an individual must willingly invest in— like any other company. Lincoln Kirstein and George Balanchine created New York City Ballet: the first truly American ballet company. It was not funded on the federal government's money. It was done so on the investment of individuals seeing the endless possibilities that dance provides. The School of American Ballet was also created to further the ideas of George Balanchine. The aesthetics of George Balanchine however are not uniquely American; they are his own personal aesthetics. Once again, furthering the point that formalized dance in America has little to no correlation between itself and the cultural identity of America. How does one fix this problem?

Like the solution to almost every problem in America, the answer comes down to money. No one expects a glamorous lifestyle with a frivolous amount of money when they decide to pursue a career as a dancer— specifically in the world of concert dance. The dancers are starving for their art because they realize the grander purpose that it serves. Dance is never only about the dancer performing a choreographer's work. Like all forms of art, there is a story and deeper meaning beyond its facade. The only difference is that dance is portrayed in a physical medium. What the audience is seeing is unique to that exact moment. No matter how hard a person may try, that moment may never be experienced the same way again. Dance is a three-dimensional art form; therefore capturing it on film would not have the same impact. Although filming it would transcend a vast majority of the difficulties and obstacles encountered in live performance, it would not convey the same message nor would it evoke the same experience. A painting may

hold its form for years to come, but a performance only lasts in that one capacity. Even if the show runs for an extended period of time, no performance is going to be exactly like the next. Subtle variations in execution of the physicality or emotions in a performance give dance just unique parameters. Dance is an excellent culmination of what the human condition is. No matter how many rehearsals a dancer may have, he or she is at the mercy of humanity. That is what makes dance so exciting and elevates man to a higher level. It is all done for the grander purpose that it serves. The depth and meaning of a dance is just as significant to the person who created it as a painter would feel towards a painting that he or she created.

How could a painting be sold for millions of dollars, but a masterpiece of choreography could only generate enough money to keep a company afloat for a fiscal year? A painter can have a single patron to fund his work, and the profits from their work would be considered revenue. However, It is not the same case for a dance company. Single-donor companies provide platforms for artists to present their work, but they often are not fiscally viable or sustainable. A company has several dancers to pay in order to bring a choreographic vision to life and a space to perform the work must be accessible. That in itself is a hefty financial burden for one person to take on— regardless of their financial status. Choreography is not a tangible item like a painting is. The value of a painting may go up or down, but it will always exist in a physical form. Once it is purchased, it is a tangible object that can be kept. Choreography differs in the fact that is an experience. It is not a tangible item. It is hard to justify an “experience” to a donor when they will not receive anything tangible in return. That is a major fault in the capitalistic attributions of America, and modern society at large for that matter. The question is: What do I get? The question should be: How does it make me feel? The higher potential of mankind is seen through

materialistic evolution and gain rather than enlightened thought. That is why the commercialization of dance works so well in America. Dancers are always selling a product. A great majority of dance in America is focused around its commercial value. There are dancers in a variety of commercials, music videos, television shows, and films. While that is putting dance in the public eye, it is not necessarily contributing to its value as an art. It makes dance less of an art than a form of entertainment. This is very detrimental to the success and continuation of formalized concert dance.

At the end of a performance in a theater, people are only left with how the work made them feel and a fond memory of the experience. Why should anyone care about dance when they do not get anything in return? What purpose does a dance performance serve? Why is it important that people spend the money on an experience? Why is important that dance is adequately funded?

Funding is the single biggest risk factor for sustaining a dance company in America. The majority of dance companies in America are non-for-profit 501(c)3 recognized organizations. Some notable companies that that have this status are: American Ballet Theater, New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. All of these companies have their own board that helps each company stay financially stable, they have committees to ensure that there are effective contingency plans in place, and the committees also help ensure that all of the actions the companies are taking are viable and sustainable. Even with all of these checks and balances in place, including a tax exemption status given upon the receipt of a 501(c)3 status, companies still have difficulties with accumulating revenue. In 2011, New York City Ballet suffered from a \$6 million deficit in its \$62 million operating budget. Being one of

the most prominent cultural institutions in the country, they still suffered from tough economic times following the great recession of the early twenty-first century. This potentially fatal happening was a result of “a drop in repeat funding and flat fundraising (Pogrebin).” Thankfully the company is well established within its community, and industry for that matter, and has had effective contingency plans in place in order to ensure that they survive the deficit. However, not all companies are fortunate or reputable enough to survive such an economic turmoil. That large of a deficit would take the well-established company years to recover from; forget about a company that is barely drawing in a profit.

Sold out shows and good reviews are not the only things that determine the success of a company. Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet is a prime example of this. This dance company provided extraordinary work by world renowned choreographers to sold out crowds throughout New York City; however, they were not able to keep up with the financial demands and constraints placed upon the company. Although good reviews and sold out shows may help for a certain period of time, bringing in consistent diverse audiences is another key to longevity. Bringing in new audiences will ensure that the consumer base will not plateau; eventually leading to a decline. Fresh audiences will create more publicity spread through word-of-mouth. More importantly fresh, diverse audiences bring in a fresh and diverse donor base; the fatal flaw that led to the demise of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet (Cooper). Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet’s biggest fault was the fact that they operated on a single-donor source of revenue. Nancy Laurie, a Walmart heiress, opened the company as a result of her love for dance. Many billionaires start companies as a passion project— not to mention a tax write-off. The positives of funding an arts project greatly outweigh the negatives. The organization contributes to the

artistic development of a community, and it often establishes an education program for the youth of the community. However the moment that the company enters financial distress, the single-donor can withdraw his or her financial support; thus closing the company in a moments notice. This is what happened to Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet in the winter of 2015.

Although the company closed its doors abruptly to the public, financial reports done by the company showed that its closure was inevitable. With the majority of the revenue coming from a foundation created by their primary donor, the board found it necessary to find other sources of revenue. In an article written by the New York Times, it was said that the company was looking for an external affairs manager that would handle establishing funding in the areas of “multiplatform sponsorship proposals for corporate partners, foundations, government, and individuals” (Cooper). The position was never filled, but the necessity for diverse funding was accredited.

All of these problems, most notably a lack of reliable and diverse funding, are detrimental to the success and longevity of concert dance in America. However, there are underlying issues that are catalysts for the problems mentioned thus far. There are problems that are causing additional problems, and this then creates a vicious cycle. Continually reaching diverse audiences is incredibly difficult to achieve. Geography limits the accessible consumerbase, marketing is expensive, and ticket prices are often too high for the average consumer. The location of a company would be extremely difficult to change; especially if the company has already established itself within a community. The cost of marketing will always be fixed at certain rates that become not practical for smaller companies to utilize. Even cheaper options, such as promoted social media posts, add up to significant amounts over a period of time.

Appropriating money properly is crucial, and it is hard for a board to justify spending money, once again, on something that does not guarantee a return. Advertisements are distributed to the public, but that does not mean that the audiences will come. By the process of elimination, ticket prices seem like the easy solution to this massive problem. Most companies rely on ticketing revenues, in conjunction with the funds acquired from their donors, to support their annual budgets. With no additional income or revenues, companies are forced to set their ticket prices at rates that are able to sustain their companies, but they are not the most accessible to the general public. How does a company lower the cost of tickets without jeopardizing its operating budget?

Additional revenues are needed to keep the cost of ticket prices lower, therefore accessible to the general public. Grants are hard to come by. The application process is long, and it does not always guarantee a reward. With the expansion of grant programs being highly unlikely given the financial climate of the country, it is safe to rule it out as being a primary source of revenue. The National Endowment for the Arts is a grant program that supplies funds to major arts institutions— including significant dance companies throughout the country. However, when tax cuts and breaks are proposed, it is one of the first things in danger of being reduced or defunded completely. In 1995, companies such as Pilobolus Dance Theater, American Ballet Theater, and Joffrey Ballet were all in serious danger of filing for bankruptcy. The companies had to make serious concessions in order to stay open. With the lingering inevitability of a threatening deficit, “Eventually, hard times are bound to take their toll on creativity, slowing the introduction of new work and inhibiting experimentation with sets, music and lighting (Passell).” Then at what point does the work become only about selling the show

and selling a product, rather than creating something new to enhance the culture. The creativity of those individuals that are making the work will suffer because they are not receiving an adequate amount of support that they deserve.

There always seems to be far more pressing financial matters to solve than the lack of funding for the arts. With government money being nearly inaccessible, the next logical step would be to ask other obvious financial superpowers: corporations. Corporations have been long time sponsors of sports enterprises. Almost every professional athletic team plays in a stadium owned and named after a corporation. They have advertisements splattered on the walls and fences of the stadiums and arenas. The whole experience screams: Money! Very rarely do you hear of an athletic team filing for bankruptcy. The truth of the matter is that sports sell. Once again, it is a commercial product. Sports sell tickets. Teams sell the brands that endorse them. It is a symbiotic nature between the client and the sponsor. With money that can easily sustain the operating budget of a not-for-profit organization, how does one streamline the sports model into the world of dance effectively? Corporations do sponsor the arts, however it is nowhere near to the extent of how sports are funded.

First and foremost, the art being created should never suffer at the hands of who's dollar it is being funded by. What are the incentives for the corporations? How does the dance company benefit? How are the roles defined? What is used to define those roles? These are very critical questions when dealing with something that could have a massive impact on a creative industry. One primary example of corporate funding of an arts enterprise is the Radio City Christmas Spectacular. The show is sponsored by major corporations, such as: Chase, Delta, McDonalds, Coca Cola, and Lexus (Our Partners). Although the show is heavily commercialized, it could be

seen as a practical business model for corporate ventures within the performance, specifically dance, industries. The Radio City Christmas Spectacular is an extravagant performance that could compete with the spectacles put on by Catherine de Medici centuries ago. Maybe this is America laying the groundwork for its cultural renaissance that European nations had centuries ago.

Government Contributions:

In an information packet distributed by the National Endowment for the Arts, the introduction page describes just how dizzying of a process it is to acquire adequate funding for an arts organization. It begins with a pie chart that models the average sources of revenue for an organization. With a vast majority of the chart being sales revenue, it is extremely important for an organization to have continuous success in order to sustain the company. This poses several problems for artists. The artists are then pressured to create something that is more commercially successful, and that can place an enormous restraint on his or her artistic vision. This would then lead them to stray from their artistic purpose and mission of the organization. When reading the rest of the pie chart, there are small slivers of additional revenue. The companies on average only receive 6.7 percent of their revenue from local, state, and federal government agencies in total. The chart also lists that 14.4 percent of the revenues acquired come from interest and the endowment. However, this source of income is heavily reliant upon specifications that must be met in order to acquire those funds.

Moving away from this chart, the National Endowment for the Arts recognizes the numerous challenges that are faced by organizations when acquiring its funding. The article goes

on to say:

“After all, the U.S. system is comprised of public and private entities, tax policies, legislative allocations, donated bequests, restricted endowments, education mandates, and social agendas. The hierarchy of government agencies, composed of city, county, state, regional, and federal strata, is itself a dizzying scheme, especially to people whose own nations have highly centralized, state-directed systems” (How The 2).

Even the wording that discusses the challenges of obtaining funding seems to hinder the creative process. The United States system for providing financial support to arts organizations is absurdly complex, but we are a nation that is built on the foundation of capitalism. By supporting the arts in a centralized manner, it would in essence be counterintuitive to the ideology of capitalism. That is not to say that the government does not support the arts. The dollar will always take precedence, but it is up to an organization to obtain it. The tax exemption status of a not-for-profit organization was created to support organizations that made valuable contributions to its community— including arts organizations. However, it takes an incredible amount of time to obtain this status. It also limits the sources of where the money can come from, and it places additional responsibilities that are seen as a financial burden on the organization.

Unlike other foreign nations, the United States does not have a centralized council on culture whose sole mission is to preserve existing art and stimulate new creations. The United States government has several agencies that are tasked with doing a similar job. Because the system is decentralized, so is the money; which is already dismal in supply at best. The National

Endowment for the Arts is the largest benefactor of government funds to create forward movement within the arts. This agency was granted \$146 million in 2012 (How The 3). In comparison, the operating budget of New York City Ballet in the fiscal year of 2017 was just over \$84 million. Not to mention that of those funds appropriated to the NEA, just about 80% of it is used to distribute in the form of grants. In order to meet the terms and conditions of the endowment, an organization must match the award given by the endowment in forms of revenue and non-federal funds. When doing the math, the NEA rewards more established organizations with a greater sum of money, and leaves smaller organizations to fight for the rest. This makes it harder for new companies to establish their footing and create substantial work that could lead to success. By not investing in new companies, new artists will not be able to share their authentic, unique expressions.

With the majority of money from the NEA going to larger organizations, that does not necessarily safeguard their financial stability. As previously mentioned, American Ballet Theater has had major credible threats of filing for bankruptcy within the last several decades. Most noticeably in 2004, the company had an operating deficit of \$3.8 million. The company took loans from board members, remortgaged office spaces, and opened new lines of credit to sustain the company (Pogrebin, Cash Flow). Being a large recipient of grant money from the National Endowment for the Arts, one can make the argument that the financial investment in grant money to larger institutions is not necessarily a guaranteed return on preserving culture and progression within the art. These things can only be achieved if the company remains open.

Structure of Foreign Nations:

When looking for inspiration on what adequate arts funding should look like, all eyes shift to European nations. While most of these nations are socialist in terms of financial structure, these countries' governments see the cultural and intellectual benefits that the arts provide. The financial support that they give to the arts is proportional to the benefits that they see it provides. For example, Germany has a cultural annual budget of \$1.63 billion; which equates to \$20 per citizen. In comparison, America spends 43 cents per citizen on the arts (Gummow). While the majority of this is done through taxation, their citizens deeply support the arts. However, citizens in America would have a very different view on raising taxes to support the arts. After coming out of a financial recession only a few years ago and a massive national deficit, spending money on the arts is not of the utmost pressing matters.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is the Bolshoi Ballet. This ballet company and the Russian government are heavily reliant on one another. The ballet company is the most expensive cultural institution in Russia. With an annual budget of \$120 million and the company receiving 70% of that from state funds, the government clearly relies on the company as a cultural manifestation of what it means to be Russian (Doperalski). With their own country facing significant financial strains, the funding for the ballet company has hardly faltered. The company has a reliable and consistent source of funding. While this sort of government support for dance companies in America is out of the question, it raises the question: Where can this kind of support be found?

Knowing Your Audiences:

With no sign of additional government funding on the horizon, the next logical step would be to draw in more audiences. It is obvious that with more audience members comes more revenue. However, that is easier said than done. With most major companies ticket prices selling for a minimum of \$100 each, this does not fit the budget of a great majority of Americans. The ticket prices require an average American to save his or her money over a period of time to attend one show, rather than becoming a repeat customer for a series of events. The demand for shows is low because the accessibility is low. Companies cannot lower their prices because they need the projected revenue in order to sustain itself. This then creates a vicious cycle. However, it is proven that lower ticket prices stimulate a surge in sales. For example, New York City Ballet noticed the lack of accessibility, and the company created the “30 under \$30” deal. This allows people under the age of thirty years old, who might not have the financial means to see a show, to purchase a ticket for just \$30. Lowering the ticket prices makes such an event far more attractive, and it encourages these audience members to come back. It is clear that this model works, but how can it be implemented for all ticket holders?

The cost of a ticket is just one factor that prevents potential audience members from purchasing a ticket. A genuine interest is the other factor that either motivates a consumer to buy a ticket or not. It is the common story for a woman to say that they took ballet as a little girl; however they almost always quit for one reason or another. One of these reasons is almost always the cost of an education in dance. Dance is expensive. In an article distributed by Time magazine, a study was conducted that determined the cost of raising a child to become a professional ballet dancer. After calculating the cost of studio tuitions, summer programs, and attire, the tabulation came out to a conservative \$100,000 (Osborn). This puts the dream of

becoming a ballet dancer out of reach to a great majority of Americans. Even if a family has the financial means to raise a ballerina-in-training, the cost will definitely be the major talking point of pursuance. Once again, money is the detriment to the success of concert dance. Because you cannot turn on the television and see a classical work of dance, the current primary source of inspiration begins at the dance studio. With those doors being shut to a large demographic, the potential of them seeing a show and supporting the art diminishes drastically.

Corporate funding:

With it being abundantly clear that the federal government has exhausted all of the funds they are willing to appropriate on the arts and it being nearly impossible to stimulate higher audience attendance through lower ticket prices, one must think outside of the conventional box. Where is there an excess of money in America? Being that the United States is a capitalist country, the money is in the hands of large corporations. Corporate sponsorship can be found nearly everywhere in the world of sports. In an article written by Jason Belzer distributed by Forbes magazine, he described it as a transformation from an association with something that was of peak interest by the public to using it as an indispensable advertising tool (Belzer). By associating a company's brand to something that can demonstrate commercial success within the public's view, both parties are able to elevate the status of their organizations. For example: the New York Mets are sponsored by Citi Bank and play their home games at Citi Field. It is similar to word association. When mentioning one of the organizations, the other immediately comes to mind. They are feeding off of each other's success. Belzer goes on to write that this is the most effective way of advertising in the twenty-first century. In the days when media was confined to

only a few channels on television, the advertising model was simple. The amount of commercials played was proportional to the reach of the public. However with media being so vast in a society where technology is constantly evolving, brand relationships are becoming more and more important. Belzer says that “the focus has now shifted [to] find dynamic partnerships that allow engagement with consumers on an ongoing basis and that become part of the fabric of the events and properties that they sponsor rather than simply using them as a means to an end (Belzer).” This means that the organizations actions impact one another. Both organizations operate on a symbiotic relationship in which the decisions made by one company has an influence on the other. An organization's influence reaches far past their own direct stakeholders, but it extends to the partner’s stakeholders as well.

One of the most notable partnerships is between Pepsi and the NFL. Pepsi is known for hosting the Super Bowl Halftime show; what some consider the largest performance stage in the world. It is the pinnacle of success for an artist to perform at this event. Because it is such a coveted event in primetime television, it comes with a big price tag. It was reported by the associated press that Pepsi signed a deal with the NFL in which Pepsi would pay \$90 million a year in licensing fees and rights for ten years. There are marketing campaigns would then be supplemental costs (Press). With the potential of exceeding \$1 billion over the course of the deal, that is a lot of cash flow for the NFL. Now imagine if corporations established partnerships with dance companies, and they demonstrated even just a fraction of the support that they give to athletic teams and organizations.

Corporations are starting to take baby steps into such endeavors, but the big leap has yet to be taken. In 1997, the Radio City Rockettes, a cultural staple to the holiday season in New

York, was threatened to lose their residency at the Radio City Music Hall when the theater was threatened by bankruptcy. In an effort to save the theater, the property owner leased the theater to Cablevision Systems Corporation. This took the brunt of the expenses off of both existing parties and allowed them both to continue on successfully. As a part of their lease agreements, the rights to the Rockettes as a dance company and their signature Christmas show were sold to Cablevision (Lueck). This then secured their financial stability, and later on their commercial success. While most critics will not rave about the profound artistic nature of their Christmas show, the financial backing of such corporations has allowed them to take creative risks that they would not otherwise take. Over the past decade, the Radio City Rockettes director/Choreographer, Linda Haberman, was creating a new spring spectacular. This would extend the season of the dancers, and it would allow for new creative, artistic expression. After spending millions of dollars on pre-production, the company decided to cancel the run of the show just weeks before opening night (Rohter). Although this new artistic vision was never fully realized by the public, such an occurrence would have been financially catastrophic had the organization not been funded by a corporate backer.

Although the Rockettes and American Ballet Theater are two completely different entities, the advantages of a corporate sponsorship are clear in both realms. Dance is a highly marketable industry. Audiences are drawn to the spectacle of dancers who defy what is physically impossible for the average person. Dance is mainstream enough for Misty Copeland, a principal dancer with American Ballet Theater, to be a spokesperson for Under Armor. The opportunities for corporate sponsorship of concert dance are present; they just need a push in that direction. Dance companies are too focused on the commercial success of what they are creating,

rather than creating something that will be praised for its artistry. They are denying themselves what it means to be an artist. These mindsets cause a lack of creativity and can offset the success of a production. The artistic process should be as boundless as the creator's imagination— not their budget or deficit.

Potential Problems:

Up until this point, corporate funding has been described as a utopia for the world of concert dance; however, there are many problems that may arise with this sort of financing. The most daunting of the potential problems is the inevitability of compromises being made— like any business deal. The money is not going to be handed over just out of good faith. The corporations will probably want something in return. This is where money could potentially jeopardize the art. With the introduction of product placements within content created in the changing world of film and television, who is to say that the same sort of thing would not be asked of companies receiving corporate funding?

When seeing the Radio City Rockettes Christmas Spectacular, it becomes extremely evident that the show receives an abundance of funding from corporate sponsors. In particular, the Chase bank logo is everywhere you look within the theater. It is on the bill of the show, and it is on some of the sets and projections used during the production. While this may be a visual nuisance, it does not have a direct impact on the creative content performed by the dancers. The corporate sponsors have given their money in exchange for visual advertising; however, the corporations did not have a major influence on the content that was being showcased. The handling of these sort of business deals will obviously be done on a case by case basis, and it is

imperative that the money does not influence the creative process. This is a form of checks and balances. The people who handle the money ensure that a budget is viable in the long term for a company, and the artists carry the responsibility of creating content that is fulfilling and appealing. Both parties stick to what they know best.

When a nonprofit organization is fully operational, the board and the creatives play two separate roles. The board makes sure that the logistics of a program can be done in terms of budgeting and finances. The artistic director ensures that the program is at its peak performance for audiences. When implementing corporate sponsors, the same sort of checks and balances must be followed.

Another potential problem for an arts organization is receiving “dirty money” from corporations. While we have seen corporations influence political bias and agendas, the arts is a new territory. Receiving money is an indirect approval of affiliating with or supporting the agenda of the donor. The morals and ethics of an organization go a long way in terms of a company’s reputability. This can potentially place an arts organization in a tricky situation. Should the company receive funds from potentially the wrong corporations to further advance their artistic endeavours, or should they run the risk of financial instability. When introducing an outsourced means of financing, an organization is no longer the sole proprietor to its reputation. The independent actions of both companies will affect one another, and that introduces an abundance of additional variables. In an article distributed by The Guardian, corporate financing of the arts has led to multiple debates, sit-ins, and protests at some of the world’s most famous art institutions. Do morals and ethics outweigh the preservation and continuation of one’s culture? The article explains this case by describing how the Tate receives its funding:

“On the one hand, the organisation is committed to reducing its carbon footprint by signing up to the 10:10 campaign, but then continues its ongoing funding relationship with BP, an organisation that is well-known as one of the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide in the world. It’s at best a mixed message, for its own members and environmental support groups alike” (Wright).

Transparency is a major component in a how a nonprofit legally works. With the introduction of for-profit financing, the line between morals and the organization’s mission becomes blurred. Does the receiving of funds have a direct correspondence to an organization’s ability to effectively carry out its mission?

Conclusion:

American society has not reached the point where dance becomes a form of cultural identity because it has not been clearly defined what that means. Ballet in particular has been trying to imitate a European model that has no cultural consciousness to American society. European countries have had the time and incubation period, not to mention the Renaissance, to have a profound affiliation between their culture and ballet. Their funding models are a direct observation of that. America is not a socialist country. It is capitalistic. Americans are focused on the dollar. Therefore, the corporatization of dance is the epitome of what cultural identity is. Branding and commercialization are some of the major attributions of modern American society. For the sake of the art and its progression in America, the business model needs to change.

Dance does not need to be a starving art form; organizations just need to find where the consistent, reliable money is.

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