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Summary

Findings from Yes I Dance: A Survey of Who Dances in Canada



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Cover image: *Le Continental XL*, choreography by Sylvain Émard, a Sylvain Émard Danse and Festival TransAmériques co-production, co-presented by Quartier des spectacles. 200 amateur dancers took part in this line dancing extravaganza.

Photo: Robert Etcheverry 2011.



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EXACUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the Canada Council for the Arts' Canada Dance Mapping Study, Canadians who dance, teach dance or choreograph were invited to participate in a bilingual nation-wide online survey called Yes I Dance (Oui je danse). The survey was designed with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of who dances in Canada, where they dance, and why. This report presents the findings from this landmark survey of the dance field in Canada.

Methods

The survey was open to all people living in Canada ages 16 and older who dance, teach dance, or choreograph dance in some type of organized or on-going way. The online survey was designed by EKOS Research Associates and Strategic Moves in consultation with the study management team. Questions were designed to capture the breadth and diversity of dance in Canada, as well as socio-economic and demographic details on Canadians who dance. A rigorous engagement strategy was used to encourage organizations and individuals to pass the survey on to anyone who dances. A total of 8,124 Canadians told us, "Yes, I dance." As the exact universe of dance participants in Canada is unknown, this is considered to be a non-representative sample of those involved in dance in Canada and results have been analyzed with this limitation in mind.

Variety of Backgrounds Involved in Dance

The sample of 8,124 respondents to the survey includes 2,176 individuals, or 27 per cent, who are dance professionals and 5,948, or 73 per cent, who are leisure dance participants. In most areas of the report, findings are reported separately for dance professionals and leisure dance participants. The overall sample is well represented by all age groups, from teens aged 16 and 17 (3 per cent) to those over 65 (15 per cent), although seniors are much less represented among dance professionals (three per cent). The average age is 45 among leisure dance participants and 36 among dance professionals. One in five in the sample is male.

Geographically, just over one-third of the sample hails from Ontario. Relative to the national population of Canada, there is an over representation from British Columbia (23 per cent) and under representation from Quebec (15 per cent). The remainder of the regions are represented in expected proportions. One-third (34 per cent) live in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, and another 18 per cent live in other Census Metropolitan Areas¹. At the other end of the spectrum eight per cent of respondents live in a rural setting.

Variety of Dance Forms Represented

One hundred and ninety dance forms are represented in the survey. Six in ten participate in the two most popular types of dance: contemporary and modern dance (34 per cent), and ballroom and social dance (26 per cent). European traditional and folk, and ballet are similarly popular (cited by 22 and 19 per cent, respectively), followed by country dance and Canadian (16 per cent). Most survey respondents (80 per cent) described involvement in two or more forms of dance. In fact, 40 per cent of survey respondents reported involvement in four or more dance forms.

¹ Urban Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) is an area consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core.

Intensity of Involvement in Dance

Dance professionals spend an average of 17.7 hours per week in dance. Leisure dance participants say they devote 6.5 hours per week to their involvement in dance, although this declines with age. Survey respondents describe a lifelong involvement in dance, citing an average of 23.9 years in dance among dance professionals and 16.9 among leisure dance participants. In fact, leisure dance participants over the age of 55 report two decades of involvement in dance, and dance professionals describe four decades of history with dance.

Form of Involvement

Most survey respondents tell us that they participate in dance through a variety of means. They dance with a group (78 per cent) and/or take classes (82 per cent). Almost half say they teach in some form of dance (44 per cent) and/or create dance (46 per cent). Over half are involved in performing for an audience or competing in dance. These performances most often take place in festivals or community events, according to seven in ten of those who perform. Over half say they perform in arts facilities. Formal competitions and school settings are also a place for one in three to showcase their talents. One in six points to televised performances or work with restaurants, theme parks and cruise ships as avenues for performing dance.

Survey results indicate that dance is organized in a variety of ways. Two in three say that they pursue dance through community groups, dance clubs and associations. Just under six in ten pursue dance through dance schools and studios. One in three say that they belong to companies, troupes or crews. Similarly, in terms of sources for learning dance, equally high proportions have learned through dance schools and through recreational/community groups or associations. One-on-one instruction is also a popular choice cited by just over one in four. Almost as many point to post-secondary institutions, but equal numbers say that they are self-taught. Validating this point, use of books and digital/online sources is surprisingly high (cited by nine per cent of survey respondents overall), rivalling primary and secondary school curriculum as a source for learning dance.

Reasons for Dance

Survey findings put enjoyment at the top of the list of primary reasons for involvement in dance when both dance professionals and leisure dance participants are looked at together. Dance professionals, however, have fairly different motives for dance compared with leisure dance participants. The most often cited motive for dance professionals in the survey to be involved in dance is artistic expression (cited by 78 per cent), in addition to enjoyment (76 per cent). Employment (61 per cent) and performing (57 per cent) are also strong reasons. Among leisure dance participants enjoyment is the most frequently cited (94 per cent), followed by exercise and fitness (81 per cent), and then social connection (72 per cent), with artistic expression as a distant fourth reason (42%). Responding to an open-ended question, many in the survey said that dance provides them with the benefit of developing deeper social connections; a response considerably more prevalent among men, in both the dance professional and leisure dance participant segments. Many also described dance as a source of joy and passion that provides them a sense of mental and physical well-being, stimulation and, in some cases, escape from the stresses of daily life. Others talked of the opportunity to express themselves and tapping their creativity, as well as teaching other valuable life skills.

Survey respondents described a connection, sense of enjoyment and participation in the world of dance, echoed in the high degree of attendance at live dance performances reported in the survey. In fact, 85 per cent of dance professionals and 70 per cent of leisure dance participants said they attend live dance performances, citing an average of six performances a year among leisure dance participants and 12 per year among dance professionals.

Dance Professionals

The 27 per cent of survey respondents who are dance professionals reported an average of 11.7 years of earning dance income. As years of earning increases with age, it is not surprising to see that male dance professionals have earned dance income for marginally longer (13.3 years compared with 11.4 among women), given that the average age of male dance professionals in the survey is older (41 years of age), than it is for women (36 years of age).

Eight in ten dance professionals in the survey report an average of 9.5 years of training through a dance school or program prior to their career in dance. Although male dance professionals in the survey are older on average, they typically report considerably fewer years of training through a dance school or program (5.9) prior to earning income, whereas women reported an average of 10 years of training through a school or program specific to dance. Six in ten dance professionals also say that they have taken some individualized training (e.g., with a mentor, elder, guru or self-taught). The average number of years of individual training is typically shorter (5.7).

When asked about their primary role in professional dance, almost half (47 per cent) of dance professionals in the survey described their main role as a teacher. Another one in three (32 per cent) said they are a primarily a performer (hereafter referred to as 'dancer') and 16 per cent described themselves as primarily a choreographer. While dancers are typically younger, it is the older dance professionals who are considerably more likely to describe themselves as teachers or choreographers.

The average income earned by dance professionals in the survey, in their primary role, is \$11,207. This is highest among teachers (\$14,170), followed by choreographers (\$10,385), with dancers reporting the least income (\$6,715). Across the different roles, incomes increase with age of the dance professional (until age 65). Men typically report higher incomes than women in the roles of dancer and, in particular, choreographer. On the other hand, in teaching it is women who typically report higher incomes than men.

Overall, dance professionals in the survey report a combined average of \$32,003, including dance-related income and income earned outside of dance. This typically includes 54 per cent earned in dance-income, with a ratio of two-thirds earned in the primary role and one-third earned in other dance-related activities. The remaining 46 per cent is income earned outside of dance. The proportion of income earned for dance-related activities, and in the primary dance role, increases steadily with years of earning dance income. For example, among survey respondents with less than one year in dance, one-quarter of all income is earned from dance. This grows to 62 per cent of all income earned through dance (with 42 per cent of all income earned in the primary dance role) for those with more than 10 years of history earning income in dance. It is even higher among those with 20 or more years of earning income in dance.

Dance professionals in the survey reported their average work week to include 40.6 hours of paid time, 48.5 hours when unpaid hours in dance activities are added in. Just over half of this time is spent earning income outside of dance (21.2 hours). Another 27.3 hours per week are spent, on average, in dance related activities. This includes

15.5 hours in the primary role (11.4 paid and 4.1 unpaid), and 11.8 hours in other dance activities (8 paid and 3.8 unpaid). Dance professionals who receive dance income through cash prizes and awards, as well as honoraria typically report more unpaid hours in their main dance role than those receiving income through professional fees and salaries, or grants to individuals.

Provincial variations

While the objective of the survey was not to specifically compare and contrast findings by province or territory, the results are intended to understand the patterns and diversity of dance geographically across the country. A profile of dance activities was constructed for each region in Canada; these are featured in the last chapter of the report. Results describe a rich diversity of dance participation across all regions. Taken together, there are some interesting patterns that stand out as more unique to or concentrated in some regions:

- The proportion of dance professionals responding to the survey was highest in Alberta and Quebec. Respondents from these provinces were also more likely to indicate they receive money for their participation in dance. Leisure dance participants made up the majority of survey respondents in every province but were more predominant in BC and Saskatchewan;
- Dance forms falling into the contemporary and modern category, which were the most common of forms among all survey respondents, were even more common among respondents in Alberta, Quebec, and PEI. Ballroom and social dance forms were more often cited by respondents from BC. European traditional and folk dances were most often mentioned by respondents in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia;
- Survey respondents in Alberta, Ontario, and Newfoundland were more likely than those in other provinces to say they teach dance, while those in BC, Manitoba and Ontario were more likely to say they dance with a group.

Overall

The survey findings demonstrate the wide variety of dance genres and forms practiced by Canadians. Also portrayed are the different patterns of involvement in dance, from starting very young and pursuing a long and formalized career in dance, to learning late in life and participating informally through community groups and clubs, and everything in between. Canadians told us they participate in dance through a wide variety of roles including teaching and choreography, as well as dancing and connecting with groups and taking classes.

Results emphasize the importance of dance learned and pursued through community sources, as well as more formalized dance schools and studios. Findings also emphasize the non-discriminatory nature of dance, practiced by Canadians of all ages, and socioeconomic segments, in a lifelong pursuit of involvement in an activity that brings them joy and connection to community. Some practice dance as a form of income and employment, but most practice it as a form of relaxation and enjoyment, to express themselves artistically, culturally and/or spiritually, and fundamentally to connect with their friends, family, and cultural or spiritual group. It is also relied on by three in four respondents as a way of practising a healthy lifestyle, using dance to bring exercise and fitness into their life. Results highlight some interesting patterns related to gender and age that point to the important role dance plays in the lives of both young women, and men pursuing some forms of dance. They also suggest the importance of social connection that dance brings to some older Canadians, particularly men, who find a way to break through or avoid isolation through dance.

Results show that dance professionals and leisure dance participants have many fundamental differences, but also many commonalities in how, where and why they pursue dance. Findings also suggest some cross over between these two segments, with most dance professionals also pursuing dance for leisure, and some leisure participant also being paid for some dance activities. Dance professionals are found within all dance categories. For dance professionals, results highlight the very low level of income earned from dance activities, and the need to supplement dance income with non-dance income in roughly equal proportions in order to make ends meet. The need to volunteer almost one-third of their hours through unpaid dance activities is also striking.