

# WHY IOTPD THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE TRANSITION OF PROFESSIONAL DANCERS?

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## *The International Organization for the Transition of Profesional Dancers*

The International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers (IOTPD) was founded in Lausanne in 1993 by representatives of dance related organizations from 12 countries. IOTPD is a non-governmental association fostering international cooperation on issues of career transition for professional dancers. During the first five years of its existence, the IOTPD has succeeded in raising the profile of the dance profession and the importance of support for dancers during their transition.

When the IOTPD was created, organizations specifically devoted to career transition of professional dancers existed in only four countries: Canada (Dancers Transition Resource Center), England (Dance Companies Resettlement Fund), the Netherlands (Theater Institute) and the United States (Career Transition for Dancers). These and other developing programs have concentrated on addressing the specific transition needs of professional dancers at (or near) the end of their careers, providing information and access to education and re-training alternatives and offering the services of career counselors sensitive to the unique situation of dancers. As a result, many dancers in the original four countries have started new careers in entirely different fields from the dance world. To varying degrees depending on available funding, these transition centers also help to address the financial needs of the transition process.

The IOTPD initial efforts were aimed at presenting and promoting to the rest of the world the activity of the four basic countries. IOTPD presented its first international symposium at the University of Lausanne in 1995 to open a discussion on the practical concerns of dancers facing transition. More than 150 people from 17 countries participated and the results of this first symposium are summarized in two documents, «The Declaration of Lausanne» and the book *The Dancer's Destiny*, published in three languages.

This symposium concluded that in many countries the status of the dancer is the lowest among performing artists, and that the dancer's professional training must encompass transition preparation. As a result of our progress in Lausanne, a second IOTPD symposium («The Dancer in Transition: Education for Transition in a Changing World») was organized, bringing more than 240 participants from 32 countries to The Hague in February 1998. Most importantly, IOTPD demonstrated its leadership role by introducing the UNESCO Resolution at the UNESCO World congress on the Implementation of the Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist. Today, organizations from more than 20 countries are IOTPD members, reflecting IOTPD's growing worldwide impact. In many countries new transition centers are under development.

### *The social situation of the Professional Dancer*

Unlike other performing artists, dancers worldwide face special economic and physical limitations on their professional life spans. In countries with state-supported dance companies, dancers face a mandatory retirement age of approximately forty. But more often, retirement comes sooner; in the United States, where dancers' careers have no statutory limit, the average retirement age is 29½. In short, dancers' artistic lives are limited, at very best, to half of their active lives – and, more often, to a considerably shorter period.

Despite its brevity and specialization, this rigorous professional experience prepares dancers well for a broad range of post-dance pursuits. But the realities of the dance career also present substantial obstacles to a

seamless transition. Dancers' salaries rank among the lowest in the performing arts. Injuries prematurely end careers. Transition attracts few public and private resources. The sacrifices of the dance career do not end at the final curtain: most retiring dancers spend valuable transition time and severely limited resources trying to acquire the formal training and credentials necessary to resume full participation in society. The situation faced in dancers approaching retirement thus not only poorly reflects their prior artistic contribution to society, but also places at great risk the deployment of their considerable talents beyond the performing stage.

Society's marginalization of dancers also adversely impacts the vitality of an art form having an increasingly indispensable role in the ongoing conflict between tradition and technology. In surpassing language barriers, dance is the ideal medium of communication between cultures. The ability to attract the highest level of talent to dance depends on the status accorded to the profession and on the second-career opportunities dancers are able to realize. The solution for increasing the viability of dance as a professional option through improvement in career transition opportunities depends on the action of decision-makers in private sector, in government and in arts management. To this end, IOTPD is planning to organize in June 2001 the First Global Conference on the Status of the Professional Dancer which will bring together representatives of the governments, foundations, and the dance community to ensure systemic, long-term support of dancers as essential lifelong contributors to society.

### *UNESCO Resolution*

*It is the responsibility of governments to finance on a permanent basis the training of artists, to promote its development and to support the reconversion of certain categories of artists, such as professional dancers<sup>1</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO World Congress on the Implementation of the Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist, Article 32, «Artistic Education and Training».

In June 1997, the World Congress of the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and cultural Organization (UNESCO), adopted the historic resolution, quoted above, to support the career transition of professional dancers (UNESCO Resolution). In doing so, UNESCO organized the dance profession as a cultural asset deserving of long term economic support that remains largely absent in most countries.

Professional dance requires an ascetic life similar to that of clergy who live by vows of poverty in order to realize their vocation. For a low income, dancers accept a profession which remains very difficult, physically risky, and of short duration. The exceptional experience of performing on stage, however, parallels the spiritual fulfillment realized through religious devotion.

Nevertheless, dancers cannot flourish without space, music, other dancers, artistic leadership, and ultimately, an audience. The need to realize these unique working requirements within a limited artistic life span compels dancers to maximize their present situation. The physical limitation on a career also accelerates artistic maturity: at 25 years of age, a dancer is at or near a career peak and can be compared with a 45 year-old musician 15 or more years before retirement age. Because of their youth and readiness to sacrifice, professional dancers are particularly vulnerable to employment arrangements that disregard their post-performing futures – arrangements that often would be considered unacceptable to orchestral musicians and opera singers. Paradoxically, these other performer enjoy careers that are on average much longer than those of dancers, yet their salaries and benefits surpass dancers' compensation packages.

These hardship often prevent many parent from encouraging their children to pursue a dance career. Young adults who were not allowed to study dance as children may have their first opportunity only when they become independent. Such dancers are full of enthusiasm and creativity but, unfortunately and irrevocably, lack the necessary early start to their basic training. In order to make ends meet they must find other jobs, and only a small proportion of this category succeeds in earning their living

as dancers. Thus their full creativity remains underutilized.

The First Global Conference on the Status of the Professional Dancer will bring representatives of government, foundations, and dance organizations to NYU in June 2001 to implement the UNESCO Resolution through several initiatives:

Ratification of a new charter of the Status of the professional Dancer in the XXI Century.

- International comparison of the status of professional dancers, their transition opportunities and their opportunity for lifetime contribution to society.
- International comparison of government and private sector strategies for enhancing the status and opportunities of professional dancers.
- Analysis of the results of multidisciplinary academic research in these fields.
- Strategic planning based on conference findings, for maximizing the lifetime productivity of professional dancers and for implementing the new charter.

The UNESCO Resolution reflects official support of the objectives of the IOTPD and the potential for UNESCO's direct assistance in gathering official representatives of government in New York for the Conference. Under the leadership of its president and founder, Philippe Braunschweig, IOTPD will fully utilize its international relations to cultivate its alliance with UNESCO and other world organizations in drawing policy makers to the conference.

In collaboration with NYU and Career Transition For dancers in New York, and fellow IOTPD members in more than 20 countries, a management team will closely supervise each planning stage of the Conference. In addition to Philippe Braunschwig, the team will include John Sexton (Dean NYU School of Law), Ann Barry (President, Career Transition for Dancers), Danielle DeCrette (representative of NYU School of Law), and Michael Byars (representative IOTPD, former New York City Ballet soloist, presently NYU School of Law student).

### *Conclusion*

The first concept of IOTPD was developed in February 1992 during a meeting in Toronto between Philippe Braunschweig and Joysanne Sidimus the founder of the concept of transition for dancers in the early eighty. If the conference of 2001 succeeds with its objectives , it will be the demonstration that in less than 10 years, a team of motivated people can succeed with the development worldwide of a new concept and with the recognition of the importance of the dancers in our society.

### **Abstract**

El artículo de Philippe Braunschweig, presidente y fundador de la IOTPD (Organización Internacional para la Transición de los Bailarines Profesionales) explica las razones de la creación de esta organización no gubernamental: la gran importancia de atender las necesidades específicas de los profesionales al finalizar su carrera como bailarines activos, a través de información sobre cursos de reciclaje, asesoramiento, y ayuda económica entre otras.