

Dance Massive Sector Update – transcript of presentation

Thursday 10 September 2020

Hosted by Emily Sexton, Arts House Artistic Director and Josh Wright, Arts House Artistic Director

Hello friends and colleagues.

Thank you for joining us today for the Dance Massive sector update.

For those in need of captioning, you can toggle the closed caption button in the Zoom menu toolbar at the bottom of the screen.

This presentation is about 25 mins. At the end of the presentation, we will give you time to submit questions to us to answer. And time to reflect.

[slide] Acknowledgement of Country

We speaking to you today from the unceded lands of the Eastern Kulin nation. From Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge these living peoples, leaders, and cultures and their ancestors, and pay our respects. Wherever you are physically today, we acknowledge it is on the lands of First peoples and that sovereignty was never ceded.

[slide] Emily Sexton, Arts House and Josh Wright, Dancehouse

JOSH:

My name is Josh Wright and I am the AD/ CEO of Dancehouse. And I have a loooooong relationship with Dance Massive. I reckon I've venue produced about 40 Dance Massive works and stacks of events. I've worked at each of the Dance Massive consortium partner organisations in my career — Ausdance Vic, Malthouse Theatre, Arts House and now, at Dancehouse. In the 2019 Dance Massive, I was even an independent producer for artists and was consultant for the festival: I did the Dance Massive 2019 sizzle reel!

EMILY:

My name is Emily Sexton and I'm Artistic Director of Arts House, as part of the City of Melbourne. My relationship with Dance Massive traverses my time in multiple roles within Melbourne's arts sector, and it started when Shian Law first approached me in 2009 in my role as Creative Producer at Melbourne Fringe, as he wanted to create a "Dance Miniature" in response, focused on emerging artists and taking place at Arts House, as part of the Fringe Hub. When I was AD for Next Wave, we were proud when works we had commissioned were remounted at Dance Massive. And in 2019 I was thrilled be part of the Festival in my current role, as Arts House again acted as lead producer for the festival, hosting the terrific festival team.

We want to acknowledge that in presenting today, we are standing on the shoulders of other Dance Massive founders, stewards and partners.

Dance Massive has always been created by the good will of individuals in organisations going further, working harder, and deeper for the dance sector we know, feel a part of, and appreciate.

Dance Massive caretakers include:

Its Founders: Steven Richardson, Stephen Armstrong, David Tyndall and Kath Papas.

Stewards include: Angharad Wynne-Jones, Catherine Jones, Angela Conquet, Sarah Neal, Matt Lutton, Michelle Silby, Olivia Anderson, Ashley Dyer, Sophie Travers

Partners and friends: Deanna Smart, Collette Brennan, Merindah Donnelly, Brad Spolding, Adrian Collette, Adrian Burnett, Carin Mistry, Amrit Gill, the OzCo International team, Jane Crawley, Stuart Koop, Deb Jeffries, Natalie Smith, Susannah Day, Angela Pamic, Nat Cursio, Veronica Bolzon, Bec Reid, Kara Ward, Marion Potts, Jo Porter and so many others.

[slide]

The story of Dance Massive

But now.

It's 2020.

And we are here to share a story about a festival.

About Dance Massive.

And this year ... in 2020 ... well it's not been a good year for anything much.

[slide]

**Dance Massive,
as we knew it,
isn't possible.**

And, we want to start by saying something very clearly.

DANCE MASSIVE.

AS WE KNEW IT.

ISN'T POSSIBLE.

If it was possible, we'd be doing it.

If it was achievable, we would.

It's sad news for many in the sector.

It's sad news for us.

But we have more to say and we are here today with optimism.

We think there's potential for real transformation and evolution.

But first let's catch-up with the Dance Massive story so far ...

[slide]

Biennial 13-day festival: 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019

Consortium: Arts House, Dancehouse and Malthouse Theatre in association with Ausdance Victoria

Dance Massive has been a biennial dance festival in the “odd” years: 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019

It happened over 13 days following the March long weekend in Victoria.

We often call Dance Massive a ‘consortium’ festival.

What this means is a festival **collectively** presented by Melbourne-based organisations. We call these organisations the consortium: Arts House, Dancehouse, Malthouse Theatre in association with Ausdance Victoria.

These organisations are *presenting* organisations — that is, we don’t *make* or *create* dance works like some of the companies do, we *present* works of dance artists to audiences.

This Dance Massive consortium was formed in the late 00s — over 10 years ago from conversations between the ADs of the consortium organisations: Steven Richardson, Stephen Armstrong, and David Tyndall. They wanted the great work of dance artists in Melbourne to get a better chance to meet an enthusiastic audience.

[slide]

Why? “No audience for contemporary dance”

The Consortium wanted to combat a prevailing idea at the time, that there was QUOTE: “no audience for contemporary dance” ...

They agreed, through DANCE MASSIVE in 2009, to present each of their dance programs AT THE SAME TIME with the purpose to increase the visibility, excitement and promotion of *local* dance artists, to *local* audiences.

Back then, Dance Massive was called a ‘**coincidence of programming**’.

The “festival” moniker, came later.

[slide]

The Dance Massive model

Simultaneous presentation

A relationship

Efficiencies in sharing common resources

SO WHAT HAS BEEN THE DANCE MASSIVE MODEL?

First, SIMULTANEOUS PRESENTATION: The consortium venues present their regular Australian contemporary dance program at the same time. This included works they commission, present and tour-in over the same 13 days in March. The presenting venues used their own programming resources to do this.

Second, DANCE MASSIVE WAS A RELATIONSHIP FORMED SOLELY FOR THE DELIVERY OF AN EVENT. Throughout Dance Massive’s history, Arts House acted as a lead producer. They coordinated administration, funding, staff, and stakeholders. It’s been a really substantial role and this has allowed Dance Massive to *not* grow a heavy organisational structure. This has allowed Dance Massive to be a relationship between

different organisations. To exist without an organisation, a person, a building, a board, a single Artistic Director, an office, an ABN.

And this relationship supported the independence of each — very different — consortium venue. For example, Malthouse Theatre has annual theatre subscribers, Dancehouse has members, Arts House develops works through CultureLAB, Dancehouse programmes from a national EOI process.

The third part of the model, is that Dance Massive created EFFICIENCIES BY SHARING COMMON RESOURCES: For example, Dance Massive staffing and campaigns and programs are engaged fresh each festival. In 2019, this temporary team included 1-3 staff based at Arts House who worked on behalf of the festival.

Other common resources of Dance Massive shared between the consortium include the website, brand, marketing and promotional lists, and publicity. One of the most powerful efficiencies has been to collaboratively market *Australian contemporary dance* to — get a number of organisations all on the dance channel at the same time. This allowed much needed traction and visibility in a crowded market for audiences and you can even track the number of critical reviews for dance works with the growth of the festival.

In summary, Dance Massive worked because dance-loving organisations in Melbourne worked collaboratively — not in competition with each other.

[slide]

Dance Massive 2019 alone

And, love it or loathe it.

Dance Massive delivered results.

In 2019 alone, we had ...

730 artists

28 seasons of work

14 world premieres

192 events

19,289 attendees / 11,500 ticketed

7 partners presenting in 16 venues

95% attendance at shows

[slide]

Since 2009

... It created a MASSIVE audience for Australian contemporary dance.

Since 2009, 67,000 audiences have experienced 118 contemporary dance works at Dance Massive.

The festival begun with a perceived problem: “there is no audience for contemporary dance” and it solved it: now, we can all feel proud that in Dance Massive, and for many other Melbourne festivals and venues: there IS an audience for Australian contemporary dance.

[slide]

Add ons

And with success, Dance Massive's "*coincidence of programming*" evolved into a full-scale epic festival.

Living up to its name, Dance Massive started to create its own atmosphere, to pull things into its own orbit.

The Festival grew lots of ADD ONS — like industry or sector initiatives — ON TOP of the show-packed festival of 20+ dance works in 13 days.

Recent Dance Massive festivals delivered:

- Large outdoor public events
- Forums and talks
- Hosted 130+ visiting delegates from Australia and around the world
- And the Festival became a place to gather and meet for other networks, congregations and sub-sectors

Dance Massive became not just a place to experience dance works, but to get The Dance Business Done. It became a full two-week not-to-be-missed itinerary of breakfasts, pitches, late night meeting points, speed-dating etc.

It was exciting. And exhausting.

And these ADD ONS became part of the fabric, and the expectation, we all had of each Dance Massive.

[slide]

Weaknesses

Like many things, many of Dance Massive's strengths were also, foundational weaknesses.

CONSORTIUM FROM 2009

The consortium of dance presenting organisations brought together for the first festival in 2009, now seems outdated in 2020. For Dance Massive 2019, we piloted associated relationships with Abbotsford Convent, The SUBSTATION and Temperance Hall.

And, over the years, Malthouse Theatre's vision clarified as a *making company for theatre*. Malthouse Theatre is not here today as a Dance Massive consortium member. Their relationship to the festival changed.

CORE FUNDING

As Dance Massive evolved from a COINCIDENCE OF PROGRAMMING to a FULL-SCALE FESTIVAL WITH ADD ONS resourcing and delivering the scale of the festival became difficult.

The ADD ONS to the festival soon required their own investment. The Australia Council, Creative Victoria, City of Yarra and City of Melbourne often came to the table for these program. There was good investment for the ADD ONS.

But we found danger in the tail, wagging the dog: Dance Massive needed core funding to sustain its common resources (staff, website, marketing campaign and producing).

For Arts House and Dancehouse, our **first job and the majority of our investment**, has always been into the development and presentation of lots of Australian contemporary dance works.

Without independent core funding, Dance Massive and its add ons, threatened to swallow the operations of organisation. The simultaneous presentation and coordination of 25 shows in 13 days pushed us to our limits and our capacity.

This need for Dance Massive to secure *core funding* has proved to be the festival's "Achilles Heel."

After each Festival, the Dance Massive consortium would fundraise for core funding for the next festival. The only recurrent, multi-year core funding was through Creative Victoria (shout-out to CV here - thank you, for that steadfast work).

Nationally, the Australia Council invested heavily in Dance Massive through project grant rounds for participants artists' projects. And through investment in many key organisations participating in the festival. The Australia Council's international team supported market development and have a long relationship of issuing invitations and hosting guests at Dance Massive.

But regular, national investment, in the core funding of Dance Massive has never been AVAILABLE TO US.

The recent editions of 2017 and 2019 were supported by singular grant rounds from the Arts Ministry — including Catalyst. And so, for a long-term festival that has been long-term insecurity - which is obviously very bad for us all.

[slide]
in 2020

So, after a bumper 2019 festival, fundraising continued with earnest.

The Dance Massive consortium knows that we need at least 12 months to confirm and deliver a festival of scale.

And in March of 2020, we did not have core federal investment for Dance Massive.

We were out of time ...

[slide]
Then, COVID.

Then COVID.

I don't need to explain the psychological or economic assault COVID has had globally, and specifically had on Melbourne. Especially to independent artists or the creative industries.

The arts sector is changed.

COVID's impact is existential.

And the global pandemic creates a huge continued risk for the artistic integrity of live performance works, and the welfare of artists and staff.

But COVID is not a mic-drop.

It's not all bad news and we have the building blocks for change ...

[slide]

A legacy and a commitment

Dance Massive has created a legacy.

After 10 years, we know that:

- There IS an audience for dance
- We also know that the ethos of Dance Massive: a partnership and affiliation of organisations can create a great festival

ARTS HOUSE and DANCEHOUSE remain deeply committed to:

- Australian dance artists
- A dance festival in Melbourne for audiences

[slide]

Some provocations

Dance Massive, as we all know, has been far from perfect.

Here are some questions we have heard about Dance Massive:

- First Nations self-determination needs to be addressed
- How is there self-representation of artists of colour?
- Should there be more artform diversity?
- What of artist-led programs?
- Who benefits? Who participates?
- What potential is there for national touring? And Regional engagement?

And here's what people say about Dance Massive:

- It is a clique.
- It is not and never was, a sector strategy.
- It needs new partners.
- It puts unfair pressure on grant rounds!
- Dance Massive is not the only festival. Or even the only dance festival nationally.
- It's been hard to understand.
- Dance Massive is not a national platform or representative.

These provocations relate to Dance Massive. And others to systemic inequalities. And many echo national and sector-wide problems.

And the world is changed.

[slide]

Recap: What we know ...

So, just to recap. Here are some things we KNOW right now

- 1) Dance Massive in March 2021 is not possible: There's nothing in the bank account. We're out of time. COVID.
- 2) Dance Massive is changed. We've shown how Dance Massive 2009-2019 worked and succeeded. But, after 10 years, in 2020, the model broke. The resourcing of core funding for Dance Massive isn't available. The consortium is different. We — and we think the sector and audiences — have an expectation of Dance Massive that cannot be met. Dance Massive as we know it, is changed.
- 3) We know too that the "Dance Massive" name — the festival's brand — means something. It has appeal, association and recognition with artists, audiences and stakeholders. While our industry remains in its 2020 hibernation, we have chosen to pause on the question of whether this brand will be used in the future. Perhaps its powerful associations will inhibit the emergence of something new? Perhaps its recognition is so strong that we can stand on its shoulders and reinvent something new? Regardless, the work we need to do now is to embrace change, and forge a different and stronger path forward.

[slide]

Arts House and Dancehouse are committed to a dance festival in Melbourne for audiences ...

What we don't know ...

And in the opportunity to evolve, there are plenty of things we *don't know* yet ...

- What kind of festival is it?
- Who will be part of it?
- How does it work? How is it resourced?
- What is the model that fits how the dance sector looks now?
- If Dance Massive 2009-19 built audiences for dance, what is our ambition for the next 10 years?
- How will an artform festival *begin* with a conversation with that artform sector?
- What is dance 10 years on from Dance Massive?
- What is dance *now*?

There is work to do. And things to discover.

[slide]

Consultation

Co-Design: Imagine a festival for dance in Melbourne

An independent team of artists and producers appointed by Arts House and Dancehouse and supported by Creative Victoria

Australia Council consultations *Re-Imagine: What Next?*

Creative Victoria and Creative State policy

And consultation and re-thinking is underway.

Artists, organisations, communities and Governments are undertaking research and taking pause to regroup, and discover new configurations, new potentials.

Arts House and Dancehouse, with support from Creative Victoria, have appointed a co-design team of independent artists and producers to imagine a festival for dance in Melbourne.

— the Australia Council is undertaking extensive research and consultation and this week released a discussion paper called *Re-Imagine: What Next?*

— And Creative Victoria will share the re-modelled Creative State, the Victorian Creative Industries policy soon

We are in a period where we will recover, and re-create, and attempt more flexible, equitable, inclusive, clever, and sustainable models for a dance festival in Melbourne.

[slide]

Not finished.

We hope to have provided some insider information that is helpful. This isn't information that is usually shared widely. We are doing this to be as transparent as we can.

We have shared how Dance Massive used to work and function — we have taken apart the engine — so that we can see what is possible to reconfigure it.

Josh and I, and our teams, know our grief for Dance Massive. And we think many of you grieve too. Dance Massive has been instrumental to the networks and careers of many in the dance sector. We acknowledge too that there is grief for those beginning their dance career, or who haven't been included in Dance Massive, or had the chance to participate — there is loss in this as well.

Dance Massive was possible in Melbourne, a city with a high concentration of resources and possibility for contemporary dance. And so we know this impact is felt across the country.

The re-drawing is nerve-wracking.

Dance Massive is one cog in an old system that needs to change. And we want to gently, with respect, hold space for a small, or a large, or a glittery, or a serious transformation. A dance festival for Melbourne in a new form, maybe with a new name.

We aren't the sole caretakers of this 10-year festival.

We aren't capable of cancelling its legacy or its momentum.

We couldn't even if we tried.

If we want a dance festival in Melbourne to be as impactful as Dance Massive we will need our *collective* input, ideas and excitement to make it happen. Dance Massive always did need that — we will need even more of that for whatever comes next.

WE ARE OPTIMISTIC.

WE THINK WE CAN DO THIS.

WE ARE NOT FINISHED.

Thank you for joining us today.