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South African contemporary dance funding: perceptions of choreographers in the contemporary dance industry, in relation to shifting funding frameworks.

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CHAPTER 1:
Introduction

i) Aims of the Research

To investigate the perceptions held by South African contemporary dance choreographers and performers regarding the state of South African funding today, and in the future. This research took place after the FNB Dance Umbrella 2006, and used its participants as a sample group that I found to be already mixed without my tampering or interference. I find that although various funding bodies have been established to support the arts, the practitioners and performers themselves have not been formally consulted with regard to the success of some of these bodies. For this reason, I set out to do the following:

a) Question how contemporary dance choreographers and performers are responding to shifts in funding, and attempt to map out various responses and perceptions held by established and new choreographers and performers, using the Dance Umbrella as a sample ground.
b) Attempt to reach a conclusion regarding the relationship between the perceptions held by practitioners towards contemporary dance funding, and the purposes of the existing funding frameworks that were established in an attempt to build a more stable and stronger funding environment for the future.

ii) Rationale behind the research

The past ten years have been a time of great change, development, growth and expansion in South Africa. This country has become the home of what many regard to be the most progressive constitution in the world, a constitution promising rights and a voice to all of its citizens. Despite the necessary focus on pressing social issues such as housing and education, the arts have been regarded with great interest and care too. Our new democracy, housing a multitude of cultures and means of expression, continues to stress the importance and benefits the arts have to offer. In order to increase and broaden this emphasis on sustainability and accessibility, and to offer funds to those artists willing that their voices be heard, public and private bodies have been established over the past 12 years. These bodies were established to

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increase funding to the arts, but they have not always been positively received and issues of funding remain controversial.

I support the approach that the arts have a large capacity for social benefit, and that they are prime vehicles through which education, social commentary and conversations between people and communities can take place. In my experience, few people can deny the need for artistic freedom, especially given the history of South Africa, and we cannot lose trace of the fact that the arts not only provide spaces for personal expression, but pathways for observations and commentary regarding government and social activity. We cannot ignore the fact that funding paradigms are shifting in South Africa either, and that these shifts have expected and unexpected repercussions.

As I am not a South African citizen, I cannot access a substantial amount of public funds in order to choreograph my own work. This has led me to search for other avenues and routes holding viable options not only to myself, but to fellow choreographers and companies too: public, private, corporate and bilateral funding. As a dance practitioner navigating this world, I found myself wondering how other contemporary dance choreographers and performers are able to support and sustain themselves. While there appear to be a multitude of avenues to approach, I began to wonder how accessible this money might be, and what attitudes exist towards its distribution, or lack thereof. In my experience, I have heard about the following five funding bodies the most: the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), the National Arts Council (NAC), the Arts and Culture Trust (ACT), Business and the Arts South Africa (BASA), and the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF). They also appeared to be the most logical place to begin searching for funding, as they are all somehow linked to public money, as explained in the following chapter. These funding bodies have also developed since the 1994 election, and so I thought that it would be interesting to investigate how and why they had developed and grown.

The state of all arts and contemporary dance funding has shifted dramatically in South Africa[1]. We no longer exist in what Business and the Arts South Africa terms an environment of ""cheque book" sponsorship" (2005, p.2). This type of funding was

[1] I discuss my definition of contemporary dance later in this chapter.

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enjoyed through the Performing Arts Councils of our previous government in order to support the then governments' ideology of the arts. The PAC's acted as production houses until the middle of the 1990's, and received the majority of arts funding at the time, producing work of predominantly white interests. The White Paper was introduced in 1996, promising artistic freedom to all, but in 2006 we have new funding bodies, and new and unique needs and challenges. New sets of criteria and information exist for each funding body, intended to meet the increasing needs of the arts industry. A much wider network of funding sources and opportunities are available than pre-1994, yet why does it seem that access and accessibility to funding remains in question? Evidence seems to suggest that the funding environment is moving forward into a new era of fiscal strength and stability, but despite this I found myself questioning if there is a still a lack of understanding from practitioners towards adapting to and adopting new structures that may aid us in keeping a healthy and potentially vigorous art form alive.

While it is evident that funding structures have shifted since 1994, in order to facilitate the growth of the South African arts industries through increased accessibility and redress, what is not so evident is how practitioners are responding to these shifts. It is important to ascertain the perceptions held by these practitioners towards funding, in order to see whether or not the funding structures are accomplishing what they were established to do. If there is a lack of knowledge regarding methods of accessing funds, information needs to be more readily available. If there is resistance to the criteria laid out by donors in order for money to be accessed and distributed, we need to bring both sides together in order for adjustments to be made where both sides can benefit. These queries may be easier for more experienced practitioners to answer, but new choreographers may not have the skills, knowledge or network to broaden their options. Yet their feedback is pertinent in order to maintain our democratic right to freedom of expression, and to grow an environment where the arts are sustainable in reality and not just on paper.

It appears that not much is being openly said about the state of contemporary dance funding in South Africa, as little is being written outside of primary sources such as newspaper reviews and articles. It has also come to my attention that there is a significant lack of writing about contemporary dance funding in books, conferences or

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academic papers, forming a lack of academic data on which to grow or compare research to. Even through the Performing Arts Network of South Africa, written papers in this field are hard to come by[2]. It is even more difficult to find articles expressing what choreographers and performers are thinking. This made me wonder if practitioners are nervous of speaking out for fear of being labeled 'troublemakers' by the funding bodies, and it is interesting to note that half of the participants of the research wished to remain anonymous. It appears that responses to the current funding infrastructures are mixed, but predominantly negative. The research I have undertaken could encourage others, hopefully the predominant funding bodies, to carry out further research regarding contemporary dance funding, but could also promote similar research to be undertaken throughout the different art forms.

This study offers an assessment of the perceptions held by those needing to access these funds in the contemporary dance field. It is not enough to change just the funding frameworks; how these frameworks are being understood and accessed by practitioners need to be gauged and monitored too. These responses are invaluable to further develop and strengthen the arts environment as a whole. An early warning towards possible marginalizing of dance can be seen quite early in our new democracy. A report by the Cultural Strategy Group, to the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, investigating the potential for growth and development in the cultural sectors, informs the department of four key areas most likely to benefit the South African economy: music, publishing, film and television[3]. The non-musical performing arts as a whole were ignored although they too employ a large number of people, and not just those performing or creating. The PANSA research indicates that out of eight investigated theatres, approximately 671 artists and approximately 189 full time staff are employed annually. This report seems to approach the cultural sector from a completely fiscal attitude, ignoring any other benefits experienced by participants and spectators, such as community building, artistic sharing and the development of respect. The 2004/2005 Annual Report of the DAC also appears to sidestep the 'problem' of supporting the performing arts (dance,

[2] Personal communication with Tammy Ballantyne, PANSA National Coordinator, September 28, 2005.
[3] Cultural Strategy Group, 1998, p.14.

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other than ballet, is barely mentioned still), and Minister Jordan's Budget Speech for 2006/2007 does not include the performing arts in their allocation for Job Creation[4].

Even the funding of the FNB Dance Umbrella is not guaranteed, despite the fact that in 2006 it allowed approximately 110 choreographers to show their works on an open platform, without incurring the costs of production. Their biggest sponsor, First National Bank, only grants its support on a year-to-year basis. Two consecutive applications for the funding of residencies at the Dance Umbrella have been denied by the NAC in the past two years, and commissioned artists still find their own additional funding, according to Georgina Thompson, Manager and Artistic Director of the FNB Dance Umbrella[5]. It puzzles me that an important and highly beneficial project, such as a residency linked to a prestigious event, would not receive funding, and that such a significant and beneficial festival such as the Dance Umbrella could be so uncertain of its financial future or existence.

Contemporary dance is a style that is constantly shifting and evolving, generating fresh vocabularies and ideas that reflect the societies in which it exists. Dancers persist with years of training, physically and emotionally, in order to be able to compete not only locally and nationally, but internationally too. While it appears that the popularity of contemporary dance is growing, it also seems to receive less funding than other genres. The research I have undertaken investigates this notion, and could be used to promote change, dialogue and perhaps further research. It will allow for funding bodies to become aware of how they are being perceived, and will also help to ascertain possible misconceptions held by contemporary dance practitioners regarding the funding bodies, how understandings might be inaccurate, and to uncover why these might be occurring. It is the people who make use of these funds who should be one of the central focuses of future developments.

I have also come across the need to readdress my own understanding of contemporary dance and how I define the style and its boundaries, particularly when coming to adding up amounts and attempting to calculate total amounts awarded to this genre. I have done this as accurately as possible and based on my own working definition of

[4] http://www.infor.gov.za/speeches/2006/06060215451001.htm
[5] Personal communication, February 2nd 2006.

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what contemporary dance is. Some people may say that by using the term "contemporary", you are immediately referring to any style of dance that is happening currently. But my own interpretation of contemporary dance (and I suspect other choreographers too) is not so broad, and for this reason I exclude ballet, traditional, modern, jazz and ballroom dance styles, yet I must acknowledge that contemporary dancers may draw on these various techniques, and more, for training.

Contemporary dance has grown from different dance movements that developed across America and Europe since the early 1900's: modern dance was a reaction against the constraints of classical ballet; post modern dance in turn reacted against the limitations felt in modern dance; and contemporary dance both draws from and reacts against these two forms[6]. My reading of the contemporary dance form also allows for the style to draw on various other techniques and to modify and blend different genres together, resulting in a fusion of two or more styles. This is particularly true in South Africa where 'afro fusion' has developed, mixing african dance with contemporary. Trying to define contemporary dance in a South African context is also difficult because I have not been able to find a definition that has been generated by a local practitioner or theoretician.

My understanding of contemporary dance includes works that develop from strong conceptual points, yet these concepts may be rooted in historical incidents, or could be immediate responses to current situations. I feel that contemporary dance works can also develop purely as an experimentation of new vocabulary, of simply dancing as a result of an innate need to move and share the experience with an audience, and not having to contain any meaning or require any conceptual deconstruction. I find that trying to define this style is difficult, but the following definition seems to be broad enough to encompass the various sources that the genre draws from: "Rather than a specific dance technique *contemporary dance* is a collection of systems and methods developed from Modern and Postmodern dance"[7].

Companies who have participated in the annual Dance Umbrella festivals, and my personal response to choreographers whose work I have seen, have guided my

[6] http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_dance
[7] http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemporary_dance

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evaluation of funding distribution. Yet still these boundaries are often blurred, as companies whose vocabulary may not be of a contemporary nature, still may have the eclectic feel of some contemporary work. For example, Jazzart's name may indicate work that is based in jazz technique, but while the company may have initially begun as such, it has grown into a company of a more contemporary nature. This leads me to wonder if funders experience the same problem when allocating funds between different dance styles, or if they allocate funds purely on the basis of specific criteria and merit.

In March 1997, Robert Greig reported that

> Arts funding in its early stages is favouring fine artists, musicians and organizers of festivals. Writers and dancers are at the end of the feeding chain[8].

To see such a criticism of funding bodies in 1997 is understandable, as great shifts and developments in funding were underway. Maggie Foyer offers a more recent and substantially different view:

> South African contemporary dance is one of the success stories of our times. It has really blossomed in the past decade and it is happening in places where the old art world didn't even know there were places. Funding is always insufficient, but companies are getting wiser at accessing what is available[9].

This is a great deal more optimistic than Greig's account, but what I find even more interesting is the acknowledgment of action being taken by the companies. This suggests that contemporary dance companies have refined their response to shifting funding frameworks by approaching and accessing funds more astutely, and that by adapting to an unpredictable environment they have come out stronger. While I agree that this is true of some companies, it leaves me wondering about how individual choreographers and performers, who are not linked to a company permanently, are surviving. This leads me to believe that because some people have the skills to access funds, it is supposed that others are learning new skills of access too. These types of

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[8] Greig is a poet and editor, and also crits dance and drama, as well as commenting on national cultural policies, http://www.kzn.ac.za/cca/images/pa/PA2005/poets/Greig.htm

[9] Foyer writes for the international dance magazine 'Dance Europe', http://www.saballettheatre.co.za/outreach.htm

suppositions are where well-intended plans begin to go drastically wrong. Research with good intentions can also leave out some vital viewpoints, as can be seen through the research commissioned by Business and the Arts South Africa, the National Arts Council and the Arts and Culture Trust in 2001.

This research sought to investigate corporate sponsorship in the arts and indicated that there is in fact a "greater interest in the arts than is generally assumed" (Coggin 2001, p.37). This research also proved that a previously untapped marketing niche exists due to a lack of awareness of opportunities for marketing in the arts. It highlighted problems experienced by sponsors through the media, and benefits for these companies, as well as further actions to be taken in order to tap into this marketing area. This research is of great value as it proves that there is a greater curiosity towards a previously disregarded industry, yet there appears to be no comment on how the practitioners themselves experience corporate sponsorship, how many of them are able to access this corporate sponsorship, and why. Surely follow up research of practitioners would strengthen the possibility of making corporate sponsorship work for both parties. Perhaps caution exists because practitioners fear that corporate logos will be emblazoned across costumes or programs, giving rise to issues of ownership. Surely the same level of concern placed on the potential sponsors should be placed on the interests and opinions of the practitioners?

When researching the contemporary dance environment, Samantha Pienaar found that

> it is not uncommon to still hear choreographers and dancers on the ground complaining about insufficient funding, limited performance opportunities and inappropriate systems of evaluation by which to promote and market their work (2002, p.36).

In my reading I have also come across the following concern: that contemporary dance practitioners might feel obliged to create works according to the wishes and needs of their sponsors, particularly international donors. In the evaluation of Dutch funding, this issue was highlighted, stating that there is "a danger with foreign funding that projects will be designed by local partners to suit their perceptions of what sponsors want" (du Plessis, N., Nuttall, S., Slob, A., 2002, p.3). Director of the Dance Factory, Suzette Le Seuer, also warns of creating an "ethnic image" for "foreigners" (Pienaar 2002, p.38). This hints back to the times of the Performing Arts

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Councils, where it was felt that these bodies promoted certain ideologies of the state, those being of a superior culture promoting certain 'high arts' such as ballet and opera (Steinberg, 4). Dr. Fred Hagemann writes that our dance world finds itself placed in a world of "market forces". The danger here, he points out, is that choreographers will begin to create work that is aesthetically beautiful but emotionally shallow (1999). These dangers leave the practitioners in a catch 22 situation – to remain true to ones own artistic beliefs while struggling to find sponsorship, or to receive funding and create to please.

In the growth of our new democracy, special consideration has been awarded to the arts in order to nurture, promote and expose them to international markets. Public and private funding frameworks have been established to make funds available to South Africa's creative artists, but are these frameworks working for contemporary dance practitioners and performers? There appears to be a lack of a coherent body voicing the issues that surround the access and distribution of funds. These voices need to be heard in order to develop and increase opportunities for our choreographers and dancers. By enabling the funding bodies and the practitioners to enter into conversation, future prospects can only be strengthened and improved. I feel that this research is necessary in order to assess the space that may exist between the perceptions held by contemporary dance practitioners, and the shifting funding environments present in South Africa today. This may help to prevent incorrect opinions being held by practitioners, and unrealistic objectives being set by the people who influence how funding frameworks are modified.

iii) Methodology and Overview of the Research

In order for the perceptions of current dance funding to be appropriately assessed, I found it necessary to determine what institutional frameworks exist today, and from where they have developed. Understanding the historical and current funding frameworks left me better equipped to engage with practitioners. It found it important to understand why the shifts were made and what new objectives were trying to be reached, particularly if the intentions of these bodies differ vastly from how they are being perceived. Since our first democratic election took place in the not so distant past, I have looked at the development of the funding bodies since 1994, and have mapped out how they have developed until today. Having this information has

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enabled me to better understand why and how practitioners responded to my research. For this reason, I briefly explored the following, more visible, institutional developments and funding bodies: *Government, Private,* and a *Mixture* of the two. This information was gathered from annual reports, and archives supplied by the different organizations, websites and from statistical research undertaken by PANSA in 2005. This also required some *quantitative* research in order to have an idea of how much money is being awarded to contemporary dance, and if the perceptions of these actual figures are vastly incorrect.

In order to appropriately and fairly obtain as honest a response of perceptions as possible, I felt that it was necessary to find a sample group that is varied in age, experience, geographical location and race, and will help me to avoid assessing experiences and perceptions that originate from a group with too many similarities. It was unrealistic for me to believe that I could physically travel through South Africa and access this type of group, given the scale and time frame of this project. However, the FNB Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg provided the space in which to find such a sample group, as choreographers and performers come from around South Africa and from overseas in order to take part in this event. Thus, a brief history of the Dance Umbrella is given in the following section, explaining why it developed and how it is funded.

This leads to the body of my project: the research concerning perceptions, for which I find it more beneficial to employ a *qualitative* method. I needed to identify and assess the range of varied *perceptions* held by practitioners currently engaging in the field of contemporary dance. This information was gathered using qualitative questionnaires and interviews. My initial contact with practitioners was through the Director of the Dance Umbrella, Georgina Thompson, who agreed to share the contact information of the 2006 participants. I then made telephonic contact with each potential participant. This contact informed the choreographers about myself and about my research, and allowed for further contact details to be gathered, such as email addresses or fax numbers. I feel that this helped to make the contact more personal, building trust from the beginning of the process. I was able to introduce the topic of funding without guiding them to any particular stance or viewpoint. I also guaranteed participants confidentiality and the option of anonymity, so that their responses would not be affected by potential judgment, and allowing an environment of trust to be

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established as early as possible. Once all of the participants had completed and returned their questionnaires, and interviews were completed, I was able to process the answers and gather some sense of how the sample group was thinking and why. My understanding and interpretation of these answers, however, was strengthened by my research into the development of South Africa's five major funding bodies.

The selection of these funding bodies is explained in Chapter 2, as are their historical developments and the environment from which they grew after the 1994 election. I have attempted to reach an approximate amount of funds that have been allocated to contemporary dance, but must acknowledge that this is according to my own frame of reference and personal understanding of contemporary dance. I have then proceeded to explain and attempted to interpret the findings of my research in Chapter 3, and have attached an abridged version of this to be found in Appendix E. I did not realise the size of the work I had taken upon myself, and it was difficult at times to try and distance myself from a subject that the participants naturally feel so passionately for. The conclusion in Chapter 4 highlights the complexity of the contemporary dance environment for me. One can see that further research, funding and time is required if the concerns of the choreographers are to be addressed. But these need to satisfy the needs of not only the choreographers, but all stakeholders too. I have tried to be as accurate as possible in my interpretation of the data, and I trust that reliable facts have been presented. I find that given the percentages of responses, my questions have been clearly answered. I also suspect that although these problems are being voiced from a predominantly Gauteng based sample group, they reflect professional challenges that are being experienced nationwide.

iv) A Brief History of Dance Umbrella: Why was such a platform established, and why do such a large number of choreographers choose to showcase their work there?

The FNB Dance Umbrella is an annual contemporary dance festival that takes place in Johannesburg, using various venues around the city. It currently has the largest number of participants of any local contemporary dance festival in South Africa. This festival allows established choreographers, new choreographers, youth groups and international choreographers to show their works on a financially supported platform. Participants are able to take part in the festival free of charge, and only have to cover

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the costs of their travel and accommodation, and any additional costs of their work (costumes, props, etc). The festival was initially developed in 1987 by director of the Vita Awards, Phillip Stein, and two of his journalist colleagues, and was called the Vita Dance Umbrella, Johannesburg. The festival became fully realized in 1989 when 14 choreographers took part. By 1999 the festival had grown to present 14 programmes in which more than 200 new works were shown and in 2006, 16 programmes showcased our nation's talent[10].

The Vita Awards existed mainly to reward outstanding work in the theatre, but Stein introduced an award for contemporary dance and choreography in 1984 in acknowledgment of the contemporary dance that was occurring at the time [11]. The first Vita Dance Umbrella festival then took place in 1989, and its impact was noticed and its potential acknowledged. Despite being based in Johannesburg, the festival grew in popularity with participants traveling from across the country to participate. The festival consisted of four evening programmes and a fringe programme that took place during the day. Vita covered the costs of advertising, publicity and the venue, but it was still the responsibility of the choreographers to find any additional funds needed for the running of their pieces. Funds from the door were evenly distributed between choreographers of the evening performances.

As the Vita Dance Umbrella grew in size, so did its partnerships. IGI Life acted as the official sponsor until 1993, when First National Bank took over and the title FNB Vita Dance Umbrella was introduced. Workshops, dance forums and choreographic workshops were being offered, and a new programme, 'Moving Signatures' was introduced. In this year, the Dance Umbrella opened up to include Southern Africa. Related festivals began to emerge: 1994 saw the rise of Vita Dance Indaba, Cape Town; Vita Dance Shongololo, Durban; Vita Dance Kopano, Bloemfontein; and in 1996, Vita Dance Umdudo, Eastern Cape. These related festivals developed various platforms in order to cope with their variety of participants, and the Main, Fringe, Stepping Stones and New Moves programs were cultivated to cope with the differing needs of each programme. The Main consisted of those choreographers who were either selected or invited to attend by Vita; the Fringe filled the bulk of the

[10] http://www.fnb.co.za/aboutus/sponsorship/danceUm.html
[11] http://www.artslnk.co.za/arts/umbrella.htm

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programmes and the entire door takings were shared amongst the participants of the Main and Fringe (although overheads are too high to continue this today); Stepping Stones ran only on Sunday/s and showcased young choreographers and youth groups. In 1998 a new programme, 'Progressions', was introduced which consisted of longer works, and by 1999 the 'New Moves' programme came into being to present works by choreographers showing considerable potential.

During these earlier years, FNB Vita was introducing awards such as the Young Choreographers Grant and the award for Most Promising Male or Female Performer. By 2000, visiting international artists offered links making it possible for South African choreographers to visit festivals such as the Montpellier Dance Festival and the London Dance Umbrella. Other African choreographers have been taking part in the Johannesburg Dance Umbrella for many years – from Zimbabwe and Mozambique to further North in Zaire. Despite this growth and expansion, 2002 saw a cut in sponsorship, and as a result the Johannesburg festival was left as the main focus and all related regional festivals were discontinued. I was unable to establish why this drastic cut occurred, but it seems to be illogical, as the festivals were continuing to grow in capacity and importance to their regions. Still, many European choreographers continue to take part with the aid of bodies such as the British Council, Pro Helvetia, the Embassy of Finland and the French Institute.

Another well-known festival is 'Jomba', where one can see the effects of the Dance Umbrella's choreographic residency, showing how the Dance Umbrella does not just exist in a vacuum. Established in 1998, Jomba is hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of KwaZulu Natal. This festival is in its ninth year, and is sponsored by the National Arts Council, Africalia, KZN Dancelink, Royal Netherlands Embassy, National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund and the French Institute of South Africa, to name a few of the sponsors[12]. In the past, FNB has provided financial support to this festival through FNB Vita commissions and the FNB Vita New Moves Programme in 2001 and 2002[13]. The 'New Dance Festival' was introduced in 2003, and in this year, four of its choreographers participated in the

[12] http://www.artzone.co.za/template_level2.asp?parentseq=1016
[13] http://www.cca.ukzn.ac/Jomba_Contemporary_Dance _Experience.htm

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Young Choreographers Residency offered by the 2006 FNB Dance Umbrella, highlighting the impact that such a residency can offer[14].

The FNB Dance Umbrella remains an important local and international festival. It still seeks funding in order to offer residencies, workshops, developmental programs and open classes. 2003 saw the launch of the FNB Young Choreographers Residency and the FNB Dance Umbrella Grant of R40, 000 – given to an individual choreographer to develop a full-length work for the festival. The predominant funder of the Dance Umbrella is First National Bank, but despite the festival's success, this partnership is only offered on an annual basis, ensuring the festival further life for only one year at a time. Other partners include the National Arts Council, the National Lottery Distribution Fund, the Johannesburg Development Agency, The British Council, United States Information Service and Gauteng Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts & Culture[15]. This has enabled many venues to be included in the festival – including the Wits Theatre complex, the Dance Factory, Constitution Hill and Sandton Square and the Johannesburg University Theatre.

The FNB Dance Umbrella hosts a variety of choreographic signatures and commentaries in the contemporary dance style. It has aided in the launch of many of our best-known choreographers who have since become recognized internationally too, such as Vincent Mantsoe and Robyn Orlin. While it aims to provide a platform accessible to all, aspiring participants still need to complete application forms describing the works they propose to create. All works need to be new, original, and innovative, and as long as the Dance Umbrella is satisfied with the application, choreographers will be accepted and allocated to an appropriate programme. The Dance Umbrella leaves the public and fellow artists to judge the work that is being shown; it does not disallow choreographers from entering because of their backgrounds or individual opinions; it does not censor or stifle potentially shocking work. It seeks to "nurture and encourage creative talent", offering a platform for artistic, social and personal commentary[16].

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[14] http://www.at.artslink.co.za/~arts/new_dance.htm
[15] http://www.artslink.co.za/arts/objects/dubrochure2004doc
[16] http://www.at.artslink.co.za/~arts/umbrella_history.htm

Participants of the Dance Umbrella are drawn not only by the financially viable platform on which to showcase their work, but also by the possibilities and opportunities to network and become better known. Participants also hope to receive media exposure and to catch the eye of an international sponsor, offering the possibility to create links not only locally and nationally, but internationally too. Some also like the competitive environment of the Dance Umbrella, the opportunity to hear feedback from colleagues, and the possibility of being noticed by professionals with whom they may wish to work. The festival provides a platform for professional, semi-professional and amateurs to show their work on programmes that have been developed to best show their works.

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