



Seeking A Healthy Dance Community, *Part I*

By Jasmine Rios

Vera Ninkovic, Deborah Greenfield and Batista Gremaud, "Respirame" Photo: Assaf Stoler

When the opportunity finally emerges for a young talent to reach professional status, the accomplishment is monumental. The transition marks the beginning of a rewarding career with financial compensation and benefits. In most professions, healthcare benefits are a basic part of an employment package. In the dance world, health care benefits are a rare commodity.

The rewards of a dance career are primarily about doing what you love, performing often and mastering your art. Though dance is a considerably low paying profession, the personal rewards and travel perks are what make dance such a desirable occupation. Considering the physical demands of dance and the minimal financial compensation, one might presume that health insurance would be the one provided benefit. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Due to the high cost of health insurance, most dance companies do not provide health coverage.

In this article, spokespeople from five different California-based dance companies and one independent artist will share their position on how healthcare impacts the dance community. From Southern California, members of the Baker & Tarpaga Dance Project, SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre, State Street Ballet, San Diego Ballet and dancer/choreographer, Deborah Greenfield will address the need for healthcare in the arts. From Northern California, Ballet San Jose will share the company's success story with their health insurance program.

In the US more than 50% of dancers are uninsured and approximately 80% of all dancers will undergo a major injury during their career. Research also shows that some dancers face challenges in acquiring individual health insurance. Coverage can be denied for any reason that is considered high risk including age, career, income, credit history and even driving records.

Esther Baker-Tarpaga, co-artistic director of Baker & Tarpaga Dance Project begins by sharing "People in our company and pretty much every company I know including every single friend/colleague are uninsured."

Dancer/choreographer Deborah Greenfield adds, "Dancers like myself, are freelance, often with limited income. We have no employee benefits, no workers' comp. and no unemployment. I personally, have 'winged it' without insurance for about 10 years so far."

Misa Kelly, artistic director/founder of SonneBlauma Danscz Theatre says, "I believe there needs to be something in place for such a high risk profession. I have a small contemporary dance company and my dancers only get an honorarium to perform. This isn't uncommon at all with smaller companies."

Healthcare reform is a key issue in the 2008 Presidential race and quality affordable health coverage is the common goal. Under this program, all people would have access to health care. Presidential candidates Hillary Rodham Clinton, Barack