

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN DANCE

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Abstract

“What is dance after all, what do you study in dance, even to the point of going to the University to research on it? What is dance when every person can dance? Go to the village where everybody knows how to do the peoples dance. You want to entertain the head of state? Don’t deceive yourself. Dance is all noise making. There is no content, no bundle of knowledge in dance” This is a typical comment even among the egg heads of the academic communities. Any wonder then that dance is hardly seen to be of academic value or otherwise, talk less of career opportunities in dance? This paper takes a look at what dance is, societal perception of dance and the dancer, dance as a discipline of studies, the dance art, the aesthetic value of dance and finally career opportunities in dance.

Introduction

The world today is the world of specialization in the different disciplines. The demand structure is such that only those who are specialists in the different disciplines can fit into a place of work. In career issues the craze today is on, law, business administration, banking and finance, Engineering, etc. Government policy makes a mandatory demand on 60% - 40% for science and the arts respectively. Parents on the other hand do not help matters-it is their choice of discipline or nothing else-and mostly it is either medicine or the law. But one must not forget that there are many other disciplines that can give one the satisfaction and the wealth that follows it. Theatre Arts is one of these where one can specialize in any given area. In Nigeria dance is yet to be seen as a viable area for exploration. Incidentally entertainment world is growing much more than one could imagine. Over 70% of what one sees on the screen is entertainment. Most of these are laced with choreographed movements of one sort or the other. But how many of us know that those choreographed movements are dance or that dance could offer one a great opportunity? Perhaps this is because Nigerians are yet to appreciate the place of dance in the world. In the U.S.A. and Europe dance is offered as a course of study from the primary school to Ph.D level. Though Nigeria has many different types of dances that could be researched into for further contribution to the world lexicon of dance and dance development, she is yet to explore this possibility. Closer to reality is the fact that many musicians are recording daily and they need dancers in the musical/ dance video world. Besides, there are so many areas of specialization, dance being a fresh area or discipline for exploration.

Looking at career opportunities in any field of studies or discipline it could be assumed that already put in place are the institutions for the training of people in the said discipline (formal institutions for that matter). Looking at dance as a career in Nigeria for instance many questions such as the following are bound to stare one in the face. How do we encourage people to go into such field of endeavour? What happens to the products (in this case human beings) after training? How would the products be accepted in the market-bearing in mind the competitive nature in the market place? How would the products fare and make a living in the labor market? What is the place of dance in the present scheme of things?

We are all aware that quite a number of dancers are brought up in the traditional method of training in the different cultural areas of the country. We also know that very minute or very insignificant numbers of dancers trained informally are employed by the Art councils of the different states of the federation while the barest number is employed by the National Dance Troup of Nigeria. Equally true is that most of the amateur dancers are engaged in private performances here and there during social engagements-birth, naming, chieftaincy, house warming, burial functions etc. Most of these dancers are trained informally especially in the rural areas.

In the western world dance as an art has become very important and popular with a variety of choreographic style and genres for entertaining large audiences. It has, as a form of recreation, undergone a surgical operation (changes). Most of the folk dances, ethnic dances, social dances of the old in the West and the USA have been turned into modern dance, (widely taught in schools). In the

U.S.A. dance as a Career; as a means of physical education and entertainment has become very popular to the point that each dance has a particular author(s). The development of theatre dance started as far back to the renaissance period in Europe. Beginning at this time the upper class were taught social dance by professional dancing masters as part of their general education. Formal dancers also took turn at teaching dance. According to Collins Encyclopedia the first school of Ballet ACADEMIE Royale de Dance was founded by Louis XIV king of France in 1661.

In the West and in the USA grown-up children could attend ballet schools run by state or private ballet companies.

Now back home what is the place of Dance in Nigeria what is the position of the dancers in the scheme of things? Does the Nigerian accord the dancer his due respect and position? Do we have such discipline as dance in our institutions of learning? Do the Universities in Nigeria really offer dance as a course? How many private individuals offer dance lessons to families or to the individuals? These and so many other questions are issues to contend with in discussing dance as a discipline. At the moment some (very few) Theatre Departments offer dance as elective. Few private dance schools are only found in some major cities in the country. Dance as a discipline in Nigeria thus stands on a rickety table

However, before further examination on Career opportunities in dance let us briefly look at what Dance is. When the human body moves in space forming shapes, within a given time sequence, maintaining a given rhythm in an organized pattern the resultant effect is what one may call dance and of course the shapes must be aesthetically pleasing. Dance steps are created from man's basic movements-for instance walk, run, jump, hop, skip, rise, fall etc. Thus when rhythmic and expressive body movement usually coordinated into a pattern and adopted, dance is the result. Dance is perhaps regarded as the oldest of the art reflecting mans age-old need to communicate joy or grief by using the most immediate instrument at its disposal-his body. Almost all important occasion in the life of primitive man were celebrated by dancing: birth, death, marriages, war, a new leader, the healing of the sick etc. But dance is much more than the above. In describing what dance means to the African Opoku and Bell (1:1965:1) has this to say:

For to us life, with its rhythms and cycles is Dance. The Dance is life expressed in dramatic terms. The most important events in the community have special dance to enhance their meaning and significances. To us the dance is a language, a mode of expression, which addresses itself to the mind, through the heart using related, relevant and significant movements to musical poetic stimuli. For a deeper insight into our way of life – our labours, material culture, aspirations, history, social and economic conditions, religions beliefs and disbeliefs, moments of festivity and sadness-in short, our life and soul, and the realities, perceived, conceived or felt, that make us the people that we have been and are at present are revealed to the serious seeker in our dance.

To some philosophers like Havelock dance is the source of all arts that exposes themselves in the human person. To Oyortey dance is not only a source of joy but an educational experience in social mores as well as therapeutic exercise and as religious exposures. Dance is an integral part of man and it is of utmost importance in mans life-both the primitive and modern man.

Dance apart from its entertainment or recreational value could be seen as an instrument of change, as vehicle or instrument of change in peoples feeling and attitude. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (1998:936) dance:

... has been used as a means of displaying political or social strength and identity. In ancient Greece for example, citizen were compelled to attend dance dramas partly in order to encourage allegiance to the city state. An example is the 19th century Hungary's purposeful revival of its national identity.

Dance functions as a reflection of social values or as a microcosm of the culture of a people. Dance affect and is affected by both historical and ecological and social factors. Dance could be used to communicate the cultural heritage of a people. Dance could thus be used for promoting socio-cultural and socio-political development of a people as well as for the promotion of the unity and identity of a people. India today exports its culture through its film heavily laden with native music

and dance. A time was when dance was seen as communal enterprise-for magical, religious purposes or for creating pleasurable social relationships. In today's world dance and its creativity have moved away so much from the religious to the social level. Dance in the developed world has become presentational where it is presented as art designed for audience.

If dance is what we could deduct from the above it means that in the modern times, dancers need be given formal training for them to fit into the scheme of things. It is only through the formal training of dancers, could Career Opportunities in dance be meaningful bearing in mind that dance means much more today than what it used to be. Ironically, today in Nigeria dance is only seen as a means for the entertainment of the kings and the queens, the visiting heads of states and the government functionaries and other social functions. We talk of dance only when we are interested in tourism. We can only appreciate the importance of dance and the opportunities in the dance art if we look at dance beyond its aesthetic value.

Suffice it to say that in our curriculum no space is given to the study of dance. In some of the universities where dance is offered in the Departments of Theatre Arts not much is done. It is a course taken as elective. In our institutions of higher learning one discovers that it's the lecturer who teaches dance that would go to the point of acquiring the drums and other instruments that he would use for practical classes. The problem is further compounded with the dearth of literature on dance. According to Susanne Langer (quoted in the Guardian newspaper 31: April 2002)

No Art suffers more misunderstanding, sensational judgment and mystical interpretations than the art of dancing. Its critical literature, or worse yet its uncritical literature pseudo-ethnological and pseudo-aesthetic, makes weary reading. Yet this very confusion as to what dancing is-what it expresses, what it creates and how it is related to the other arts, to the artists and to the actual world-has a philosophical significance of its own.

Though Langer was talking about Europe the situation in African compared to Europe is better imagined than described. Another problem facing us is dance class is-how do we take students who are hungry and gaunt-looking in practical class?

The Dance Art

The dance becomes art through the creative ingenuity of the dancer who creates body images in motion in space. In the process of the dance, there is creation and recreation, construction and reconstruction of floating body images, the dancer creating spectacles using his body to reflect the realities of the society. According to Penrod and Plastino (1990:4):

Modern dance reflects the time in which it is danced. It is usually contemporary, because it is created by and for those who are interested in reflection of life today.

Dance in Nigeria Today

In Nigeria the dancer has not really been accorded his rightful place in the scheme of things. The dancer is looked upon with disdain. He neither gets his reward nor gets recognition from the people though he may be applauded when he performs in one social function or the other and it is all over. He hardly ever looks forward to becoming a professional. Never-the-less, the place and the significance of dance in today's dynamic world can not be overlooked. Dance as art has opened so many vista in life opportunities that dance career need be critically examined.

Dance as a Career

Among other things, Career Opportunities in dance are dancing, choreography, teaching, dance critique/ analysts, dance therapy, composing, dance historian, research and dance psychology and so many others. Because dance is a composite art other areas of the technical theatre are involved namely: sets, stage design, costume, make up, lighting, musicology, painting e.t.c. Further opportunities abound in the following areas for the Nigerian interested in dance

1. Dance history (dance historian)
2. Dance etymologist

3. Dance creator
4. The Home video world-musical videos-scripting of dance for music videos
5. Dance for social outings-marriages, birthdays, house warming, burial, holiday resorts, large gatherings e.g school end of year activities, etc.
6. Scripting dance for music scores
7. Calisthenics
8. Performing in church gatherings
9. Aerobics both for the young and old
10. Training (children dancers)
11. Choreography
12. Dance as a means of Physical Education
13. At Games events and outings.

However, it is of utmost importance to take note of some salient points as regard dance as a career. Dance art like any other art form may not give one the opportunity to make wealth or to ride to the peak of fame. Success or stardom may not be an easy task. The longed-for reward in form of wealth or fame may not be guaranteed. In retrospect, the world over, the financial reward is low and even in the developed world where dance is highly appreciated it is not really easy to get to the stardom in the real sense of it. Even in the United States only few people make it to the Hollywood. The dancer almost the world over would have to support himself by means other than dance. It is not even easy to organize a show or to produce a video dance album.

One should know that being involved in dance, means working extra hard, learning and acquiring dance technique and the skills needed to perform. The dancer spends his time acquiring the greatest possible skill like the athlete.

Dance as the most exhilarating of all the arts is time consuming and energy sapping. Penrod et el (1990:VII) corroborates this in the following words.

Physically rigorous exhausting, menta-ly stimulating and exasperating and creatively exciting and frustrating ... the joy of movement well executed, the exhilaration of creative endeavour and the appreciation of dance-the most fleeting of the art forms.

In spite of all the odds the art of dance continues to flourish all over the world especially in the developed worlds. New forms of dance are daily created. In the third world like Nigeria, given the right condition and the right training there is much to explore in the world of the dance. The consolation of the dancer should however, above all, be his contribution to the dance world and to humanity in search of life and living.

Though the dancer may not get a living wage from dance his joy should equally be his contribution to the vocabulary of movement and widening the horizon of the dance art. We should also realize what role dance could play in this globalization era. Africa has much to offer in the field of cultural heritage. We should therefore explore the principle of comparative advantage and make dance art a serious endeavour.

Conclusion

Dance as a composite art offers so many opportunities. However, it is only when we include dance studies in the curriculum right from the primary school and accord dance its rightful place in the scheme of things would the generations yet unborn acknowledge and appreciate our effort at dance. The people also need to have a change of attitude towards dance and dance studies for dance to be appreciated as a discipline. Above all flexibility in the choice of career should be the watchword. Dance career opportunities are open to all genders-males and females.

Recommendations

- a. Change of attitude towards dance
- b. Including dance in the school curriculum from the primary school through the Tertiary Institutions.
- c. Showcasing of dances from the local government areas throughout the State of the Federation of Nigeria.

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- d. The promotion and development of dances
- e. Promotion and documentation of the dances in video films, etc.
- f. Finally the establishment of dance schools not only in the big urban areas but also in the country sides.

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