

# About Youth Dance

*"What is youth dance? What are the challenges it faces? Where is it heading? Lowdown asks the sector to respond"*

## **A unique energy**

*What is youth dance practice?*

- Fostering the artistic voices of young people.
- Young people have valid expressions that can be articulated in dynamic, energetic and educational ways.
- Youth culture generates and responds to artistic climates.
- Through live experimentation and live performance young people's energy can be harnessed and enhanced in a positive way that is informative to the wider community.

*Why work with youth?*

- As young people ourselves, it is a prime directive to work with youth. In the roles as Artistic Directors, working amongst our peers dually informs our artistic development whilst encouraging others to strive for their chosen goals. We are enriched by these practices with young people whilst working as active role models.
- It is our belief that providing young people with the opportunity to create, develop and perform their skills in a highly professional environment encourages confidence in future endeavours. Stomping aims to recognise and foster the special qualities in each individual member.
- The energy that youth bring to the working environment is very unique. Through an arts practice like Stompin', this energy is absorbed and translated into challenging works that are presented to the wider community. Artistically, it is our hope to develop audience education and the broader understanding of youth arts practice.
- Through Stompin's commitment to producing continued site-specific works, our youth are continually refocusing their perception of their own environment. As such our young people inherently question their surroundings and sense of place.

## **Bec Reid**

*Co-Artistic Director, Stompin' Youth Dance Company*

## **Drawing on cultural diversity**

Tracks works out of Darwin, where our population is culturally diverse, influenced by Western, Aboriginal and South East Asian cultures. So what is youth dance for a

young Aboriginal male who has grown up on an out-station and has visited Katherine many times but has never been to Darwin or Alice? Or the young girl whose mum is Thai and speaks little English? Or the newly arrived African refugee? Or the other new kid whose dad works for the army – she has done ballet since she was four. In fact all of them have been dancing since they were four. What about the youth from the Greek family? (Darwin is the third largest Greek city in the world.) This is our challenge, to create opportunities for our young dancers to develop within the environment they call home.

How do we fully draw on the richness of these cultural upbringings and the 'nowness' of living in the Territory? What is the best way to develop and be true to these individuals' passion to dance? If they go down south to train they either come back a week later or several years later with a Western dance training which seems to have little relevance to them back home in the Territory. So most leave again not to return. In the Territory we need to address these issues so we can work towards a truly rich dynamic and diverse dance future. Dance artists that have made a difference here feel comfortable in both their bodies and mind in dancing with a group of traditional Aboriginal dancers, a group of Filipinos or a Western dance piece.

## **Tim Newth**

*Co-Artistic Director, Tracks Inc*

## **An artistic collaboration**

At any age dance and dancing is a powerful means of making sense of one's life, for interpreting the world. In the interest of developing communities of creative and socially and culturally aware citizens, young people deserve access to as many 'interpretation tools' as they can muster. While young people are involved in dance in many ways – as young professional artists, as audience members, and as students in private studio, vocational and tertiary training environments – it is another activity altogether that the Dance Board regards as 'youth dance'.

Youth dance is an artistic collaboration between professional artists and young people to create and/or perform dance. Youth dance is an inclusive practice and

young participants of both genders are skilled or unskilled and come from every possible permutation of social and cultural demographics. Central to youth dance practice is the empowerment of young people through direct creative experience. The collaboration between the artists and the young people is built on mutual respect, reflects youth culture and allows the young people to deal with artistic and life issues important to them. Youth dance is not training or education focused, though skills development is an important means to an end. Even then, the emphasis is on developing skills through the creative process and not on physical skills or technique as *the* outcome. Many participants do not, nor ever intended to, pursue a career as a dancer.

With these values in mind the Dance Board recognises that there is a whole spectrum of youth dance activity. As with any other area of dance practice the Board embraces all genres and aesthetics and encourages and supports diversity. Points along the spectrum include community-based projects (from the purely recreational to those responding to needs or issues) to activity where 'pre-professional' dance skills are an equal or driving objective. Then there is everything in between.

## **Dance Board Australia Council**

### **Part of a young culture**

Whenever I am asked exactly what youth dance is, I always find myself thinking that at its heart, it is a bunch of youth groups and/or individuals getting together to do some moves. Dancing and feeling empowered in their bodies and integrated in their selves.

But what then do we make of this behaviour? A behaviour so broad in its inclusive nature and yet defined in the different ways in which these groups and individuals manifest themselves...or are manifested. There are also many amazing adults around helping these opportunities to fruition. And what does that help mean? Who is better than who and which one is more valid?

In other words, what is the context?