

The Legacy of PHILADANCO: Broadening Appreciation and Opportunities for the Art of Dance

Angela M. Brown 16 May 2012

I am an American living in Skopje, Macedonia—I just saw *PHILADANCO* perform last night and it was amazing! You did an outstanding job and the audience went wild. Really—one of the top performances I've seen. -A *new PHILADANCO fan!*

Last month, PHILADANCO was the first American company ever to perform at Dance Fest Skopje in Skopje, Macedonia. According to the feedback cited above, it appears *PHILADANCO* not only made history, but expanded its fan base beyond the more than 100,000 diverse audience members who attend *PHILADANCO*'s roster of 50–60 performances each year.

Since its trailblazing inception in 1970 to address the lack of opportunities for minority dancers, *PHILADANCO* is credited with training more than 4,500 dancers who have

traversed stages in the Americas, Europe, Asia and beyond. The company's artistic directors and dancers, alongside nationally and internationally renowned guest choreographers, have cultivated a reputation for a dance repertory with passion, power, skill and diversity that has catapulted *PHILADANCO* into the role of a cultural ambassador representing the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the United States, as exhibited by its current tour to Macedonia.

Under the leadership of its Founder and Artistic Director, Joan Myers Brown, *PHILADANCO* has truly made the globe its stage and continues to make its mark in the world of art & culture as documented in the biography, *Joan Myers Brown & The Audacious Hope of the Black Ballerina: A Biohistory of American Performance*. In the book, internationally acclaimed author Brenda Dixon Gottschild highlights the achievements of *PHILADANCO* as she details the hardships and artistic advances of African-Americans seeking to create opportunities for dancers of all races in the 20th and 21st centuries. A testament to what can be achieved in the face of adversity, the book could also serve as a case study of the trials and triumphs of nonprofit arts organizations across the country which daily fight to survive despite their undeniable, positive impact upon the communities in which we live and work.

According to the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, arts institutions like *PHILADANCO* are credited with

creating 62,000 jobs in Pennsylvania, generating \$283 million in tax revenues and pumping \$2 billion into our economy. Yet, in its most recent analysis of the region's cultural sector, *Portfolio 2011*, the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance reported that nearly half of the organizations it polled operate in the red. This is due in large part to a dramatic decrease in earned income as well as a nearly 20 percent drop in contributed income from corporations, foundations and government (Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance 2011).

While the study found the region's culture sector managed to make the arts more accessible than ever, bucking a national trend of declining audience participation, with median ticket prices of \$15, on average ticket prices are a third of the median cost of production. This forces arts organizations to cut already small administrative staffs, and reduce or simply draw a line through minuscule marketing budgets, among other measures, in order to cope in an increasingly challenging fiscal environment.

On a positive note, *Portfolio 2011* reported that our region's arts organizations saw individuals step up with a 20 percent increase in their giving. In fact, individuals proved to be the greatest source of support for cultural organizations during the recession. Admissions, tickets and tuition revenue rose 11 percent, and memberships/subscription fees grew 8 percent. In other words, individuals—people like you and me—saved the

day.

Last fall, *PHILADANCO* launched *The Legacy of the Arts Fund*, established to ensure that the great history of *PHILADANCO* is preserved and that a vibrant future for the company is secure. In this time of declining financial support for the arts, *The Legacy of the Arts Fund* affirms *PHILADANCO's* commitment to nurturing emerging dance talent from all walks of life and its dedication to ensuring the arts continue to enrich our lives. Participation in *The Legacy of the Arts Fund* and others of its kind enables arts institutions like *PHILADANCO* to flourish, as both a haven for aspiring dancers and choreographers as well as a leading promoter of the vital, electric energy that the arts brings to each of us.

The hallmark of any great civilization is its arts and culture. Not only do arts organizations generate revenue for our local economy, they generate quality of life. Communities with vibrant arts and culture scenes benefit socially as well as economically granting its residents a feeling of connectedness, safety and livability while attracting visitors to fuel the local economy. This cannot be left to chance.

PHILADANCO has never lost sight of this, serving as the resident modern dance company of The Kimmel Center while maintaining its roots in the heart of the West Philadelphia neighborhood where it began with a mission

to present the highest quality of professional dance performance and improve the skills of emerging and professional dancers and choreographers in a nurturing environment, while increasing the appreciation of dance among its many communities. This will be *PHILADANCO's* legacy. What will your legacy be?

Angela M. Brown seeks to make a difference while inspiring others to do the same through her community service, mentoring and frequent speaking engagements. She currently serves as president of the *PHILADANCO* Board of Directors, host of TBN's news & public affairs program, "Joy in Our Town," now airing on WGTW-TV in the greater Philadelphia region, and as a member of the Philadelphia Mayor's Commission on Aging as an extension of her work as director of marketing & public affairs for NewCourtland, a Philadelphia-based senior service provider. In recognition of her achievements, Angela has been honored with the Philadelphia Business Journal "40 Under 40" Award and the "40 Under 40 Minority Executive Award," among others, but her proudest achievement is her family, which includes her husband Kevin, pastor of The Perfecting Church; son, KJ, a graduate of the United States Military Academy Preparatory School and now a sophomore at Binghamton University; and daughter, Olivia, a senior at Camden Catholic. Continue the conversation with her by following [@BrownAngelaM](https://twitter.com/BrownAngelaM) on Twitter.

References

Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. (2011). *Portfolio 2011*. Available at <http://www.philaculture.org/research/2011-portfolio>.