

Statement on Serving the Dance Community by Arts at the Armory Co-Directors Stephanie Scherpf and Jess White

At the Center for Arts at the Armory, we are known for hosting and supporting a diverse array of art forms--music, theater, dance, circus, literary arts, podcasts, visual arts, film and many sub-genres within those forms. We have worked hard to make Arts at the Armory a better home for dance and dance artists, and we continue to work on that every day. As hard as we try, we also know that our spaces and operational model can't be "all things to all people." At Arts at the Armory, we serve dancemakers and dance artists primarily through performance, presentation, and some large-scale participatory, fundraising and video shoot events. Our spaces and model are not designed to support dance residencies, creation, rehearsals, classes and workshops, all of which require large amounts of open, safe space over sustained periods of uninterrupted time at subsidized rates that are accessible for dance artists.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are at the core of our five signature programs, including the two programs that specifically relate to dance—[Feet Keep the Beat](#) and [the Performance Opportunity Program \(POP\)](#). Given some of the limitations we face, we knew that at Arts at the Armory we could do a good job presenting percussive dance, historically one of the more marginalized forms of dance, which is why we created Feet Keep the Beat, a multicultural percussive dance festival that creates a platform for leading local artists in Tap, African, Step, Kathak, Flamenco and Irish, and their respective cultural communities. POP is a program that provides highly subsidized rental of the Performance Hall to artists and cultural workers in all art forms, and we've presented several POP dance performances over the past 3 years.

We are also proud to be a performance / event space for the following dance companies, collectives, choreographers, and dance artists: Boston Tap Party, Deborah Mason School of Dance, NACHMO, The Floorlords, The Flavor Continues, Boston Dance Alliance, Jean Appolon Expressions, Peter DiMuro's Public Displays of Motion, Celebrity Series, Music from the Sole, Laura Sanchez, DrumatiX, Tango Society of Boston, Fernanda Ghi Tango, SAC's AiR Program, Ruckus Dance, Paul Kafka Gibbons, Molly Wheat, Detritus Dance, Collective Moments, Tess Saoirse Dance Company, New Movement Collaborative, Natalie Johnson Dance, OnStage Dance Company, Alive Dance Collective, Mosaic Dance, Urbanity Dance, I-Opener, CafeRaqs, Queer Tango, Forro with Raisa, GottaBall! and others.

Pre-pandemic we provided booking services for the former landlord of the Armory for the B3 space in the basement that used to be set up as a dance studio but we neither owned or operated that space.

Related to the Somerville Arts Council (SAC)'s new focus on operating dance and movement spaces as [SomArts](#) at The Hive in Union Square, and on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the Armory building, we understand and appreciate the needs that are being served, and are largely supportive of the general concept although we do have some questions and concerns. On the one hand, the City administration talks a lot about having to proceed with caution at the Armory and within the local arts ecosystem so as to respect conflict of interest and "anti-aid" legislation.

However, some of the beneficiaries of the spaces currently being operated by SAC are SAC staff and board members.

We have not yet seen articulated in SAC's mission statement a focus on operating and programming brick and mortar arts spaces. We have not seen any data related to the occupancy rates of these spaces and/or who is using them and for what purposes (i.e. what is the mix between paid classes, rehearsal, creation, production, performance, etc.). Relatedly, we do not know what SAC's overall budget is, and/or the allocation going to rent and staff these spaces but we estimate it must be over \$150,000 annually. We don't know what the sustainability plan is for these spaces—if staff and administration were to change, or if budgets are cut, what would happen? We do know that Somerville's few core arts non-profit organizations which serve hundreds of thousands of Somerville residents each year (including Arts at the Armory, Mudflat, Deborah Mason School of Dance and others), were grateful for City-distributed federal pandemic relief funds but have faced diminishing returns in terms of annual project grants administered by SAC (ranging from \$0 - \$2,000 this year) while together we advocate for annual operational support grants from the City as SACO (Somerville Arts and Cultural Organizations).

Related to SAC's SomArts spaces on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the Armory building, we would like to see the operators of these spaces participate in the Armory arts tenants community, and be held to the same rent and operational terms. If that could be achieved, we think there is tremendous potential to work collaboratively on an array of projects, collaborations and mutually supportive space use. This essential point of "fair play" was brought up early on by Armory Master Plan consultant Create Today but has not resurfaced in the Armory Master Plan process since the consultant was sidelined. We are still here, trying to have those conversations, with anyone who will engage. We welcome you to reach out at any time to dialogue about all of the above—Stephanie can be reached at director@artsatthearmory.org and Jess can be reached at operations@artsatthearmory.org.