Ngoma Center for Dance

WASHINGTON, DC

About Ngoma

Shawn Short founded Dissonance Dance Theater (DDT) in 2007 to create a locally, nationally, and internationally known dance company that celebrated diversity. On the heels of local success, and recognizing a need for dance training to create a pipeline of the high-caliber diverse artistic talent Short sought to feature, in 2013, DDT merged with Ngoma Center for Dance.

Ngoma is dedicated to presenting contemporary ballet and innovative dance works; to training students with the utmost refinement and education best-practices; and to enriching the lives of communities through the love of dance and theater.

The Challenge

In February 2016, Ngoma's Board and executives began a strategic planning process. "We were very open about how we needed to address issues with our mission and revenue. During the first few years of operations, we focused on qualitative analysis until we realized we were [operating] in the red," said Short. To make sure Ngoma would become sustainable, the executives recognized that they needed to have a better grasp of the financial and audience realities facing organizations like Ngoma.

How DataArts and the CDP Helped

"We knew that we had to appeal to a larger audience base to survive. Great programming and marketing would be the keys to generating more revenue," said Short. "We wondered, 'How are we going to get the data we need to help us achieve this?'" The Ngoma team used DataArts' Cultural Data Profile (CDP) to gather financial information, apply for grants, and compare analytic reports for organizations with a similar budget size. "We found that some organizations did 15 performances in a single year, whereas we had only had eight. We asked ourselves 'How did they do that?'" This line of questioning led to fact-based insights and approaches that Ngoma might consider.

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Shawn Short
Founding Director

"In a sense, the CDP was a gateway to using data in the new data revolution, because it enhanced our decision-making and appetite for analytics. We started looking for additional data sources, new channels, and turned to left-brain activities such as probability," said Short.

As a result, the Ngoma team decided to target a younger audience in its programs, educational activities, and marketing. "DataArts was the launching pad, and now, it is always how we evaluate what is working for the organization."

DataArts in a Word

"**Equity.** Through data analysis I noticed that few organizations offered development opportunities for minorities age 18 and older. I wanted to provide training opportunities to young African- American youth and men who hoped to dance professionally," said Short. In response, he created Dawn: A Black Men's Initiative, which offers artistic and practical work experience in dance and arts administration with leadership development and mentorship provided by African-American men. "The impetus was that I found data that told me what I didn't want to hear, which was roughly that youth-of-color were being lost to an unwavering social demise. It made me want to create better data for social change. I'm happy to say we're on the right track: Our members have gone on to dance in companies, cruise lines, and tour with mainstage performances."

About DataArts

DataArts is a nonprofit organization that empowers the arts and cultural sector with high-quality data and resources in order to strengthen its vitality, performance, and public impact. The Cultural Data Profile (CDP) is DataArts' flagship service, which thousands of cultural nonprofits use annually to report their financial and programmatic information. DataArts is a catalyst for data-informed decision-making that results in stronger management for arts and cultural organizations, better-informed philanthropy, and a rich information resource for advocates and researchers.

For more information, visit us at www.culturaldata.org.
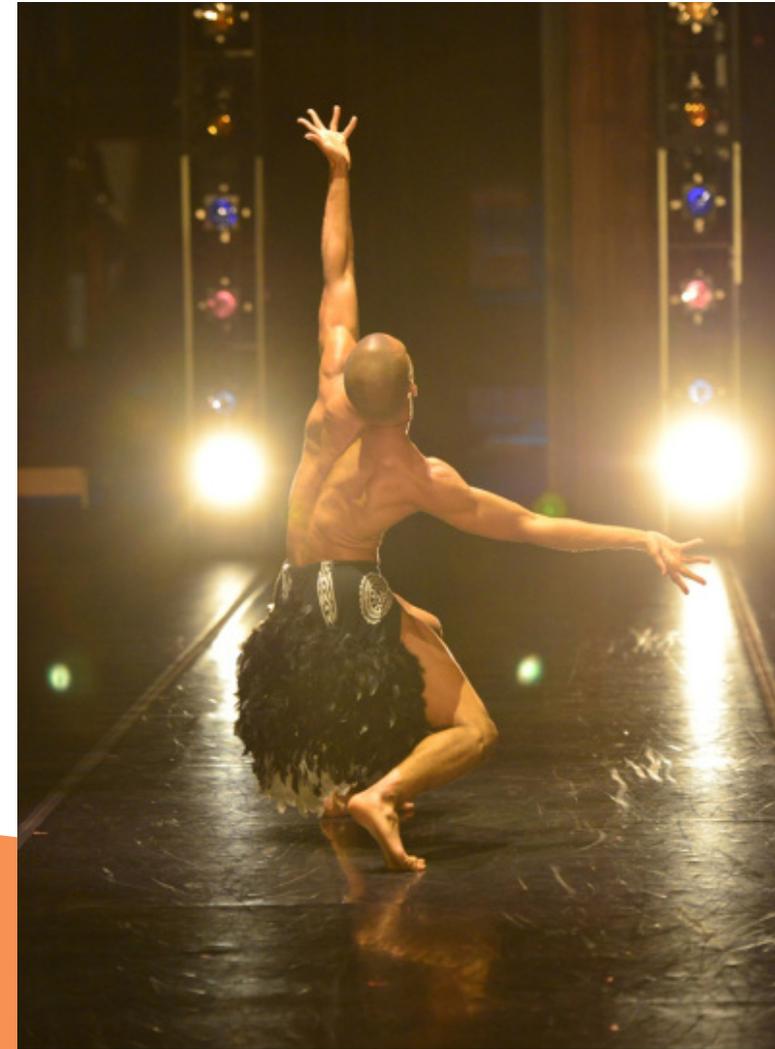
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