

Summary
**1st Conference of the Speakers and Representatives of German Ballet, Dance and
Dance Theatre Companies**

Tuesday, June 6th 2017, 11:00am - 5:00pm

Dachverband Tanz Deutschland
Kunstquartier Bethanien, Mariannenplatz 2, 10997 Berlin-Kreuzberg

For the first time, ensemble speakers and representatives are coming together to discuss shared issues and concerns far beyond the limits of each company. The participating dancers are starting to develop a common self-awareness. The main discussions are: working conditions, health care and prevention, and career transition. In the future, dancers want to address their concerns by closer and more substantiated communication. It has become clear that they generally see themselves exposed to unregulated and straining working conditions. Through *Network Dance* dancers will seek to actively influence the conditions of their creative establishment and take more responsibility for their art form.

**For the future of dance art:
Fair contracts. Participation. Protection of Health.**

In this spirit, *Network Dance* dedicates itself to the following tasks:

1. Development of a structure for the network and a second dance ensemble representatives conference
 2. Website *Network Dance*: providing support through information
 3. New labour contract 'NV Bühne Tanz' and broad unionization
 4. Dialogue on better support in career transition: financially and conceptually
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1. Development of a structure for the network and a second dance ensemble representatives conference

Dancers are in great need of discussion and improvement throughout all areas of their creative work in German theaters. Until now, they have addressed their problems with their directors and superiors very rarely and quite tentatively. Work councils are seldomly asked for help due to lack of information. This is a fundamental problem.

The following reasons are mentioned:

- job insecurity: contracts are not renewed allegedly because of artistic reasons; it remains unclear if there are other unspoken reasons outside the artistic area
- dancer's passion for their art form and the short career period makes them more submissive and prone to exploitation
- casting is used as a way of intimidation
- language barriers
- low age average
- lack of knowledge, missing skills in constructive debate, fear of confrontation
- ensemble speakers are particularly vulnerable
- traditionally engrained submissiveness to authority

The following steps are considered as viable solutions:

- raising awareness of these issues within each company
- providing support through better information
- better knowledge about the legal situation and
- stronger communication skills of ensemble representatives
- networking, buildup of competence and a collective representative structure

Network Dance shall contribute to easier communication and therefore improvement of common problems by exchange of concerns, information and arguments. Each speaker should forward the results of the *Network Dance* conferences independently to their respective ensemble, thereby clarifying and improving the current situation of dance in theaters.

Furthermore *Network Dance* shall build up a collective representation for all companies, with a form of membership and with an elected board of speakers.

This will avoid personal confrontation within each theatre. The concerns of dancers will be brought objectively and substantiated to their directions, employers' representatives and unions on a more constitutive platform.

Employed dance professionals in Germany are represented by three unions at the moment: *ver.di*, *VdO* and *GDBA*. Therefore there should be a collective communication into each of them regarding many topics in negotiation of the labour contract.

2. Website www.networkdance.de: Providing support through information

There is still a considerable lack of knowledge about many topics concerning employment in German theaters. Information is especially needed regarding contracts and labour law, but also about matters such as health care, work accidents, pension and transition.

The website should support dancers in getting to know their rights. The labour contract will be accessible there. Referring to this, it has also been suggested that employers should hand out the full *NV Bühne* labour contract, possibly company agreements and house rules when a contract is concluded. The English version of these documents should also be accessible online. Additionally, the website can point out the rich knowledge and experience of *Tanzmedizin Deutschland e.V.*, so that dancers can better benefit from physiotherapeutic options and dance medicine in the future.

3. New labour contract 'NV Bühne Tanz' and broad unionization

The current regulations by *NV Bühne* with its subdivision into 'solo and group contracts' are on one hand unclear. On the other hand, similar deficits are mutually described.

In this sense, it should be the goal to transform the framework of *NV Bühne Solo/Gruppe* together with other legal labour conditions into a *NV Bühne Tanz*. New company agreements, such as the one of the Staatsballett Berlin, could be a starting point.

Listed below are collected examples of recurring problems in everyday work practice:

Working days / free days:

- The rehearsal schedules are often posted late or changed on short notice, which shortens recovery time. This is normally justified by an 'emergency' reason. Therefore the term 'emergency' has to be clearly defined.
- The work day should be 7 hours. The working hours should encompass rehearsals and shows. On days without an evening show, the 7 hour work day should include costume fittings, meetings and the execution of other duties set in the contract. On days with an evening performance, working hours before the afternoon break should be limited to 3,5 or 4 hours.
- The term 'appropriate break' has to be specified.
- Regulations referring to free days and the splitting into several half free days are unclear. A half day of work should encompass 3,5 working hours instead of 4 working hours.
- Traveling days should not be considered free days, but should be defined as work days.
- The *NV Bühne Solo* contract guarantees eight free Sundays a season. These should be announced in advance.
- Public holidays: It is unclear if working on public holidays should be compensated by another free day. In many theaters this is not the case.

- In some ensembles, the dancers can work up to three consecutive weeks without a free day. This has to be better regulated: for example a maximum of ten consecutive work days between two free days.
- The amount of compensation for additional dancing or singing in musical productions should be better regulated.

Other issues:

- The morning training for dancers should serve only as a preparation for their work day and injury prevention. Training time should not be used for choreographic purposes.
- The fear of contracts not being renewed each year makes communication for dancers difficult.
- Wages are unjust in comparison to colleagues of other departments in the theaters as well as taking into consideration the short time of a dancing career.
- There is a lack of access to free physiotherapy (treatment and prevention), as well as a lack of knowledge and connections to doctors specialized in dance medicine.

4. Dialogue on better support in career transition: financially and conceptually

The dancers' limited time for an active stage career urgently has to be considered. The theaters should take responsibility for dancers' transition, as well. There is a short time frame between 32 and 44 years of age, in which dancers can ask for a full compensation payment from the *Bayrische Versorgungskammer* when finishing their stage career. Consequently, the insurance policy is indirectly dictating the end of the dancers' career. Regarding this matter, dancers should be given more freedom. They should have the right to have a voice regarding these regulations. The transition process should be absolutely considered a part of the profession. Therefore, it would need a supporting scholarship program (not only in advisory service). It is a problem that the compensation payment for career transition is directly taken from the dancers' pension plan. It needs to be discussed how these two subjects, transition and pension, could be approached separately.

Closing Debate

Attended by:

Anja Hauschild tamed - Tanzmedizin Deutschland e.V.
Jörg Löwer GDBA - Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnenangehöriger
Ilka Schmalbauch Deutscher Bühnenverein
Sabine Schöneburg ver.di Berlin/Brandenburg
Christiane Theobald BBTK - Bundesdeutsche Ballett- und Tanz Direktorenkonferenz
Gerrit Wedel VdO - Vereinigung deutscher Opernchöre und Bühnentänzer e.V.

Main discussion points:

The conference results are presented by Michael Freundt (*Dachverband Tanz Deutschland*). He emphasizes that during the conference the dancers have debated and collected their concerns for the first time, acting constructively on common issues.

The dancers underline that their main concern is the improvement of their labour rights. However, when stepping forward to express these concerns, there is great anxiety about the negative consequences in their artistic work.

Christiane Theobald acknowledges the meeting as an historical event and encourages everybody to take a cohesive path. In the future, every ballet and dance theatre directorship should be responsible for each dancer having all contract documents at their disposal (*NV Bühne*, company agreements, opera house rules).

Ilka Schmalbauch emphasizes that the negotiation between bargaining labour partners has always been to enhance ideal working conditions. She believes much has been achieved, but only through further negotiations can we accomplish more. Therefore, it is important that the ensemble speakers take initiative within each theaters' affairs. In order to provide better information, the *NV Bühne* contract will be available in English soon.

The unions' representatives stress that they are fully committed to vouching for the dancers' concerns. Entrusted to their members, the unions advice that a membership is the key to directly participate in negotiation.

Anja Hauschild explains the competence of *Tanzmedizin Deutschland e.V.* and how the association operates. There are existing possibilities for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, that should be communicated to all ensembles. She suggests that theaters should become members to provide more support for *Tanzmedizin Deutschland e.V.*

The discourse is to be continued in the next conference, but also in a continual dialogue with the *BBTK*.

Berlin, September 2017