

HOW TO **SURVIVE** AND **THRIVE** IN **DANCE**



DANCE
LEADERS
GROUP



Author Oliver Scott, MBA SMLDA
Produced by Mercurial Dance for The Dance Leaders Group
Published 2023



This work is licenced under a creative commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0
International. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Deed.

<https://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en>

TABLE OF CONTENT

3	INTRODUCTION
4	TERMINOLOGY
5	THE FREELANCE BUSINESS MODEL
6	COREY BAKER DANCE CASE STUDY
12	MOTIONHOUSE CASE STUDY
18	AUTIN DANCE THEATRE CASE STUDY
24	NOFIT STATE CIRCUS CASE STUDY
30	ELOQUENT DANCE COMPANY CASE STUDY
36	MERCURIAL DANCE CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The Dance Leaders Group (DLG) commissioned this piece of work, 'How to survive and thrive in dance'. It responds to the needs and questions of the network that arose at the March 2023 summit. The aim is to look at a small selection of business models of dance companies to help spark new thinking, growth and development in the community of freelance dance artists and companies in the DLG. Through discussion, 6 companies were shortlisted to explore a range of business models and structures.

Interviews with the company leaders about the change moments in their businesses explored the drivers for growth. These interviews form the basis

of the case studies. I drew together the commentary referencing Simon Sinek's, Start with Why¹, and adding who and where to this framework. This helps unify the wide ranging discussion I had with these dance leaders into a distilled framework, giving a snapshot of their businesses in 2023. I explored approaches such as the Business Model Canvas² and other evolutions of this approach for creative business by various authors. On balance, however, have chosen to depict the business models as an image. I've used the ways described to me by the business leaders during the interviews, as an authentic way they see their businesses.

WHY

We aim to inspire the thinking and action, ambitions, pragmatism and determination for dance leaders to grow their businesses. We seek to create a financially healthier dance ecology in the midlands. By doing this, we want to enable more people to experience the joy that moving and being moved in dance brings to everyone's lives.

HOW

Alison from NoFit State Circus says 'You know more than you know you know. And you probably have the answers, you just haven't found the questions yet'. We invite you to ask yourselves about your questions. Think about your why, how and what and enact the change you want to see.

WHAT

These case studies, which are a small part of the DLG programme. Connect with the DLG. Be part of our network and draw on the collaborative strength working together brings.

WHO

The Dance Leaders Group (DLG). The DLG is an open, independent network of dance professionals and leaders across the West Midlands with a hunger to collaborate and a commitment to inclusion and equality. A Dance Leader is any dance professional who is committed to contributing to a bigger vision for a thriving dance sector and empowering its communities to achieve more than they can on their own. Someone who uses dance to inspire others.

WHERE

The DLG is based in the Midlands.
www.danceleadersgroup.co.uk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to acknowledge the support of Fabric and Birmingham Royal Ballet, the current conveners of The Dance Leaders Group. Funding from Dance Hub Birmingham and Arts Connect for 'The Audacious

Ambitious DLG & Critical Mass What Next 2022-2024' project which this is a part of. The DLG steering group for their input and support of this project, and the dance leaders who've contributed.

¹ Sinek, S. (2011) Start with why: how great leaders inspire everyone to take action. London: Penguin.

² Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y. and Clark, T. (2010) Business model generation: a handbook for visionaries, game changers, and challengers. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

TERMINOLOGY

I've tried to avoid jargon, but there are words that have meanings that I've used. Here is how I've used these.

BUSINESS MODEL

Your companies plan to make money.

As dance artists we have a plan to make dance, to make art. The plan to make the money to support this is as important, the variety of sources for where this comes from and how it fits together is called the business model. There is an academic field of study on business models, with terminologies used interchangeably, I've tried it to keep it simple. Here a business model is your company's plan to make money.

REVENUE

The income (money) you make from selling your products and services.

PROFIT

You've made money: The money made as the difference between the amount earned (revenue) and the amount spent in running your business. You've earned more than you've spent.

NATIONAL PORTFOLIO ORGANISATION (NPO)

The name given to an arts organisation that receives a regular 3 year investment of funding from the Arts Council for their core costs and activities.

TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS

Private sector entities that provide funds to support charitable endeavour including the arts

NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND (NLCF)

The National Lottery Community Fund gives grants to organisations in the UK to help improve their communities, through an application process.

FREELANCER

A self-employed individual who lend their skills and talents to a number of clients on a flexible basis.

TURNOVER

The total revenue, (all the sales/money) you make over the year.

LOSS

You owe money: The money owed as the difference between the amount earned (revenue) and the amount spent in running your business. You've spent more than you've earned.

YEAR END

The end of the financial year of a business.

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND (ACE)

The national development agency for creativity and culture, a non-government organisation responsible supporting the arts including distributing funding.

ARTS COUNCIL WALES ARTS PORTFOLIO

The name given to the group of main organisations that receive yearly grants towards their core costs and activities.

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND PROJECT GRANTS (ACE PROJECT GRANTS)

Arts Council England approach for distributing national lottery supported funding. Money generated from profits from the national lottery is put into the arts via an application process.

THE FREELANCE BUSINESS MODEL

Many who work in dance are freelance artists. Within this broad term there are a number of different ways that creative freelancers bring together their work and their business model. Many creatives who form business identities start as freelancers. To discover

er what your freelance model and the generation of value is, I direct you to some great work led by Nick Henry at Coventry University, published by Creative United³. Here is a summary of their freelancer typologies that they have produced from the research.



³ Source and for more details on these categories below visit <https://www.creativeunited.org.uk/services/the-value-of-creative-freelancers/> For the full report visit <https://www.creativeunited.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Mind-the-Understanding-Gap-The-Value-of-Creative-Freelancers.pdf>

COREY BAKER DANCE

CASE STUDY



Blown. Photo: Allan McLaughlin

Company name	Corey Baker Dance Ltd	Moving People Pictures
Director	Corey Baker	Corey Baker
Company Number	09499284	13460116
Founded	2015	2021
Legal Structure	Private limited company, Not for profit.	Private limited company
Turnover	£350-400K across both	-
Public Funding	c.30%	-
Board	No. advisor group of people	-
Employees	3	-
Freelancers	varies	-
Volunteers	no	-
Main Artform	Dance, Film, Creative Director	-
Space	Hot desks at SohoHouse members club www.coreybakerdance.com	-

PROFILE

I'm a creative director, director with a choreographic background, who can create and produce anything. Corey Baker Dance is an award-winning production company creating a diverse array of work across film, TV, theatre. We run a dedicated TV and film production arm Moving People Pictures.

WHY

We celebrate movement, champion the environment and other causes we're passionate about, and pride ourselves on doing surprising things in unexpected ways.

WHAT

Project specific work produces a range of dance films, commercial and arts funded work, commissioned collaborations with other companies across, TV, theatre and unusual locations. Current offers Corey as creative director. Short films. A large *new project* tba.

WHO

Corey Baker leads Corey Baker Dance and TV/film production arm Moving People Pictures with core team of 3: executive, development and line producers.

HOW

By sharing the values through outreach programmes and performances on stage, screen and unusual locations to audiences of millions around the world.

WHERE

Broadcast and streaming platforms, where the work is.

KEY POINTS

on Company Journey and reflections on growth moments

- 1** Learning Skills: Pushing to be a rehearsal director/choreographic assistant to Sean Parker in the BIDF commission of *Spill*, which did 252 gigs world wide 2012 and learned a lot from this experience. For example, sitting with the producer on *Spill* on tour, in back of a van, the day raining and the show cancelled with them teaching him how to make budgets in excel. This was where a lot of learning, pre company took place.
- 2** Building Network: Approaching DanceXchange leadership with a mutually beneficial offer to develop a job role that combined a range of freelance stuff at a lower salary, giving stability, and using this income to unlock first ACE grant to make his first show *Headphones* (2014). Opened up potential for a series of creative commissions, and Corey initiated projects. To give CBD a producer, a dance house to base, a community, and a profile in the city, Birmingham which led to creating a whole plethora of things.
- 3** Building Reputation: 2015 experimenting with business model of combining a touring indoor theatre piece and outdoor version for Rugby World Cup team with *Kapa Haka Tale* and *Haka Day Out*, simultaneously touring *Headphones* for income. By 2016 taking 3 outdoor arts shows touring across the summer and the sales of these financially enabling Corey and producer 1-2 days a week to continue through winter season.
- 4** Making Changes: Finding that this business model was unsustainable, burning out on this need/demand business of outdoor arts touring, and stopping, going to film school enabled by the Dancers Career Development Fund.
- 5** Making Dance Films - *Antarctica*: ambitions to make the first dance on Antarctica as an extension to his work dancing outside. Packaging a film, A documentary, Ballet Commission with Arts & TV Funding to create the whole Antarctica project with all of them making the other viable, and cross fertilize with each other.
- 6** Covid: *Swan Lake Bath Ballet* as a culture in quarantine commission doing really well in viewings and strengthening links with BBC and opening up new opportunities. Shifting his mindset from being a 'choreographer' to a creative director with movement background and focusing on commercial commissions for the companies.
- 7** Choreographer and Movement Director for Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony was the biggest thing to date that publicly been seen and recognised however, all the other big things coming through were in development before CWG 2022. CWG22 was a bit like the vodka in a margarita, there are other ingredients in there for the business model.

KEY TAKE AWAYS

From interview

- 1** Corey says "I know what I want. And I ask for it until I get it. My biggest like mantra is just know what you want and know how to communicate it".
- 2** "I've learned the business of me, which I think is as important as the business of the economics to create it to make it happen" a key aspect of this is looking at the work period he is in. Taking a three tier structure of: thinking of the idea, the downtime to consider and dream; the produce – to get the funding, and to make it happen; and the delivery, the actual creation and output. This is a minimum three month process. "parts 1 and 2 of this process are horrible, if you're not paid, not looked after haven't got a team or don't know how to do it don't know how to get to this point, it's an absolute nightmare and things can knock you off."
- 3** Personal attributes. Work Ethic Personal attitude of a high work ethic, first in the office last to leave. Grafting. Corey talked about his background coming from poverty, a single mum, on a New Zealand council estate with no money growing up, fundraising at 14 years old by selling stuff to get to ballet school in Australia, instilled the concept of working to get money, to produce everything and make something happen.
- 4** It's always about learning from everything. Being very opportunistic, clear about how and what the people and projects will give, and what he/the project needs from them.
- 5** Relationships, Corey talked consistently about phoning and tracking down as many producers/people in the organisations and networking to get him to the right desk and used an example of his *new project*, an ambition from young to develop a live piece from a film IP that needs rights securing from a major streaming company. It has taken over 5 years to get to the 2023 development phase.
- 6** Business strategy has to be organic and go hand in hand with ambitions, when turn arounds can be very short and hard to plan for. RuPaul Down Under, and other commercial film commissions came in with a few weeks' notice this year.

ADVICE

for those on their journey

My thing would just be to tell anyone - you can do it, and like it is totally possible. Just figure out exactly what you want to do and why you want to do it and then just communicate to the right people about it.

That's really as simple as it is. And it will just take time, and maybe you don't know the right right people, but you'll know someone, like even if it's your, you know, your grandma, your grandma might go, oh, actually Shirley down at the, you know, the cards tournament. Her grandson is Bob who works as a cleaner at the BBC ask him then Bob knows, Janice, who's an intern at the BBC. And then, before you know it, if you've got an idea, you can communicate.

In mentoring artists, the biggest thing in their heads, like the biggest hurdle is that they think they're supposed to suffer. But their talent is astronomical, they don't know how to manifest what they think in this incredible art form into something that could be commercially viable. And I think some people think still, commercial viability is a bad thing. I think your pro-

RESILIENCE

Creating dance is probably 10% of your job as a choreographer and it's a shit show all the rest of it. And you've not been given any resource or time or development or encouragement or understanding of the other stuff then how are you going to do it?

It's always about learning. It's always about going. Like every job, you're reinventing yourself, and you're reinventing your art form, and you're reinventing how the job is done. I mean, it's absolutely psychopathic, and absolutely exhausting, and completely unnecessary. But that's the way our industry works. And it's super helpful just to acknowledge that and go, okay, cool. This is what I'm taking away from that.

“Know what you want, why you want it and communicate it, and you can do it. it's someone that's going to take some f*cking time, so be patient.”

cess, your art can be whatever it wants to be. Just figure out this, think a little bit more about how you package that and where it goes and what it's for and where it is, then I think a lot of people would get more out of their craft. Essentially, I think I'm saying, don't be afraid to make engaging work.

HOW TO CONNECT

We do a mixture of headhunting and open calls for staff and collaborators.

POSTCARD

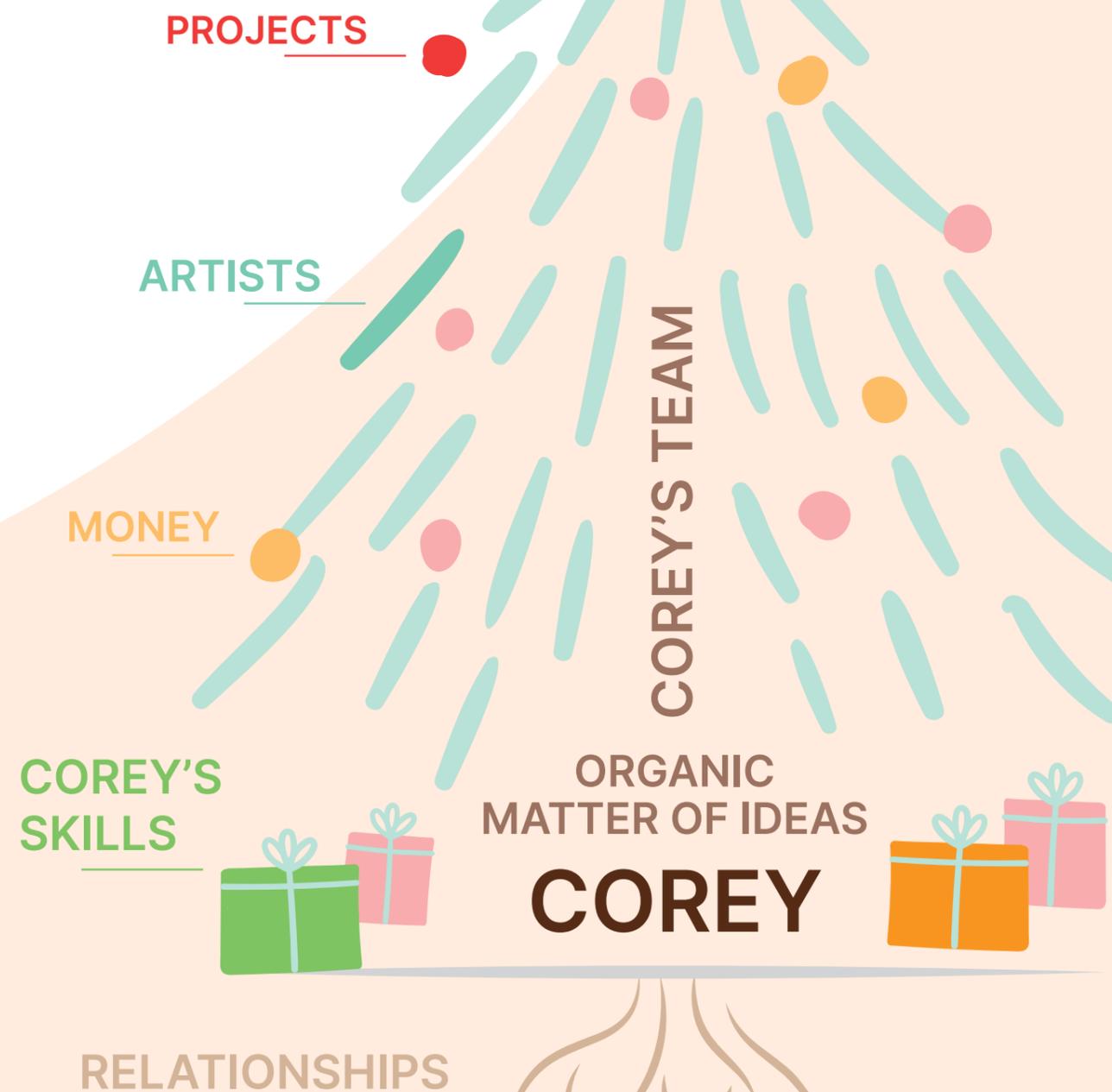
to your younger self

Be Patient. And it will happen. Don't be afraid of success, like, don't be afraid of it, don't be afraid to make engaging work.

THE BUSINESS MODEL

The business model's basis is commercial products, that generate good revenues, and allow Corey to be artistically fulfilled. The revenues service the development other commercial projects, part fund artistic subsidized projects.

Residuals (ongoing payments from films) bring a passive income stream to the businesses. Corey described his model as a Christmas tree. With the bucket of organic matter being Corey's drive and ideas, feeding the core team, the branches and leaves of the people and artists he works with. The projects - the outcomes the shiny baubles that create the money. I've added the roots of relationships that Corey develops to support the growth, and his skills (gifts) around the tree.



MOTIONHOUSE

CASE STUDY

Motionhouse with Critical Mass performing Wondrous Stories, Birmingham 2022. Photo: Brian Slater.

Company name	Motionhouse
Director	CEO Louise Richards, Artistic Director Kevin Finnan
Company Number	02515820
Founded	1988 (incorporated as a Ltd Company and Charity in 1990)
Legal Structure	Charity number 328693
Turnover	£1.3m (2021) £1.33 (2022)
Public Funding	Arts Council NPO c.26%
Board	13
Employees	23
Freelancers	8 regularly, scaling on production.
Volunteers	-
Main Artform	Dance Circus
Space	Creation space at old town hall, community studio and office. Rented www.motionhouse.co.uk

PROFILE

Motionhouse create and tour a wide range of inspiring and powerful dance-circus productions to theatres and festivals in the UK and across the globe. Our distinctive, highly physical style integrates elements of circus and acrobatics with breath-taking dance to surprise and delight our audiences, using powerful narrative and incredible digital imagery. We also offer a vibrant programme of education and training activities for all ages, including classes, post-show discussions, workshops in schools and a range of professional development opportunities. We are supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

WHO

Louise Richards, Kevin Finnan, with a company of dancers and core team.

WHY

Dance changes lives. We believe that dance is an incredibly accessible form, in its power to communicate both as performance to audiences and through participation, dance has this incredible power to change lives. We believe that dance is and should be for everybody. Everybody should have the opportunity to see work that excites them and makes them see the world in a different way. And everyone should have the opportunity to move.

HOW

By leading a team of exceptionally trained dancers and other creatives to create and touring extraordinary dance circus productions at multiple scales from duets to theatre to mega events, mass participation, education.

WHAT

Current touring productions offer multi scale shows: short duets *Gravity*, *Knot*, *Lost* and *Happy Hour*; Outdoor arts: *Wild*, *Captive*, *Henge*. Theatre: *Nobody*, *Starchitects*, *Starchitects Save Santa*, and *Hidden* a new production in 2025; JCB Events; Large scale commissions.

WHERE

Company base in Leamington Spa and touring UK/World.

KEY POINTS

on Company Journey and reflections on growth moments

- 1** First dance administrator 2 days a week, supported by a scheme run by Chisenhale Dance in the early 1990's, led to them employing first full-time administrator, with the dancers on project contracts.
- 2** Louise Stepping out of performing in 1996 as strategically it was really apparent for the company to grow it needed someone to be full time managing the company.
- 3** Mid 1990s mastering Google search engines helped bypass the gatekeepers of the time, as the London dance programming was dominated by a couple of people.
- 4** 1998 responding to losing 50% of their annual funding, by downsizing to 3 people and no technical support. A partnership with Rural Touring network, Live and Local from noticing the gap that no dance ever toured rurally as it was always too large and elite, so positioning a work for this market – *Atomic*. A work that was micro scale and could go anywhere. "The show was designed to be viewed in traverse.. and we realised you didn't need a sprung floor, or lights, just the set. The set had to be the stage, which now seems really obvious but at that point was a radical idea". The subsequent shows artistically evolved this model through the sets they designed with *Fearless*, and *Volatile* and coined their marketing term of multiscale work as it could be presented in a theatre or outdoors as easily as the set was the stage.

- 5** The business model developed with an Indoor touring pillar and Outdoor arts/festivals touring pillar. Festivals enabled the leap from winter theatre touring to summer outdoor arts and so to employ the dancers on first 40-44 week contracts, then ultimately to all year round. This brought the ability to spend longer developing the company's skills and touring the work for longer as they were able to pick up isolated gigs and still have the company together to present the work.
- 6** Artistic evolution of integrating projection into the film sets, which really came together effectively in *Scattered* as a show and the partnership with Logela Multimedia, their digital collaborators.
- 7** Relationships – people seeing the work leading to the mega event commissions (not forgetting the partnership and hard work to turn these opportunities into a commission) with examples of programmers traveling to see *Broken* on tour in Denmark, which led to an invitation for *Watermusic*, for Aarhus European Capital of Culture 2017. And JCB performances in Cornwall in 2004, leading to *Renaissance* a site specific show with JCBs at the future Olympic park in 2006, to *Run* in Greenwich in 2008, and with this the relationship building towards both *the Voyage* and Paralympic Games opening ceremony in 2012.
- 8** Marketing presence, via google social media and other approaches, as people have also found the company such as TBI (The Big Idea) approaching the company to perform at Wembley in 2021 for the team GB homecoming, then for ITV New Year Big Bash in 2022, and then Eurovision Welcoming Ceremony in 2023.

KEY TAKE AWAYS

From interview

- 1** Artistic work first. All the discussion is led by the artistic work the company make and the opportunities came from commissioners seeing this work, either by developing relationships, or by seeking it out. The way Louise talks about is the most integrated of the companies reviewed in the case studies. Artistically all the elements of previous work and shows are evolved and feed into the work at different scales. This crosses over with being opportunistic
- 2** Being opportunistic – seeing gap for where dance could be and how to service this artistically, like the step into rural touring work, and the step into outdoor arts festivals. Motionhouse were amongst the first/the first into touring dance in these markets. And also seeing the opportunities inherent in the people you meet.
- 3** How you approach Risk. Take risks, if you don't take risks you won't make new discoveries and are not going to do anything new. But understand the risks. Making physical risks safe – the dancers do crazy stuff but it is safe; and Artistic risks, not being safe in the vision, being able to think outside the box in terms of what is and isn't achievable. Louise is a producer who has made and performed work herself. It gives a massive advantage to be able to think outside the box, and accompanying this with pragmatism from a business point of view.
- 4** Having an offer at every scale: if people come to the company with a budget of £600 they have an offer. Its not *Wild*, or *Nobody* but there is a wide ranging rep to support every request that comes into the company. This keeps the repertoire alive, the dancers performing all the time, feeding their skills, and the name alive and visible all year. The dancers need to generate income, and being comfortable saying this to them.
- 5** A four year cycle to make a new theatre show, which will do about 70 shows. It is driven by affordability as it costs a lot of money to make a new show, and that theatre tends to make a loss overall and is subsidized by their outdoor arts shows. Together, the pillars of indoor, outdoor and education keeps the company together, working, touring and dancing all year round.

1

Do a good job, leave a good impression.

2

Having the right pitch ready, at the right time – being able to talk about the work and why it should receive funding, or get a booking, as these moments to make an impression are easy to lose.

3

Time. It has taken 35 years of hard work, resilience, evolution and development to get to this point, with the first 20 years involving a lot of sacrifices and barely earning a penny.

4

Start with why? Why do you do what you do? Why is it relevant to the world right now? And being conscious about why this merits public funding.

“it’s a really basic thing, but there is something to be said for being articulate about your work and leaving a good impression”

HOW TO CONNECT POSTCARD

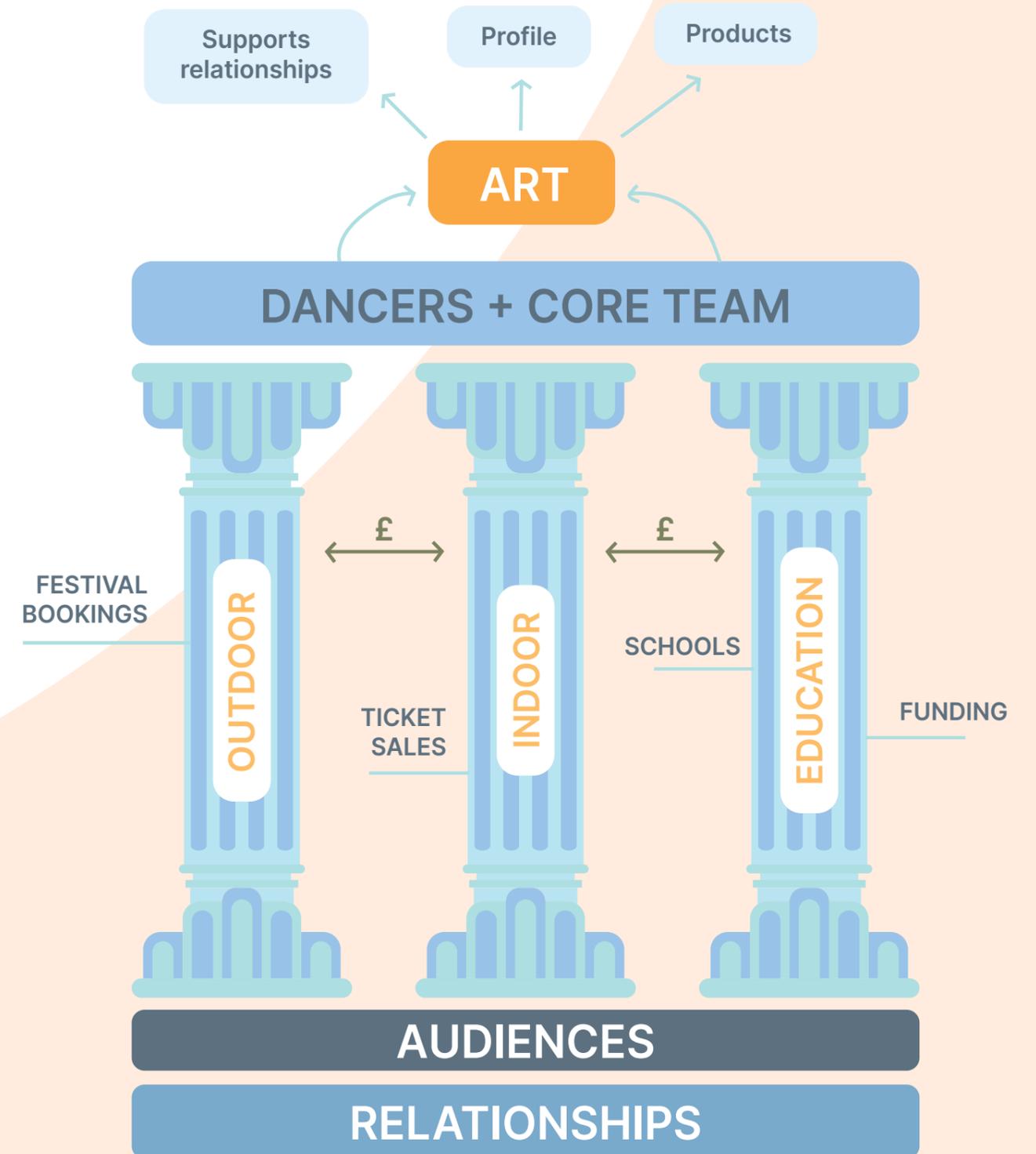
Auditions, open calls, recruitment campaigns. It is essential getting to know their work, and helps to connect with the company. Routes include through open class, shadowing and the workshop programmes along with seeing the shows. Motionhouse have a pool of freelancers to draw upon for the larger events that can come up at relatively short notice. We are looking for performers who are courageous, interesting to watch, people who are prepared to work hard, performers who have stamina and ‘gumption’. We try to get to the root of people’s potential as nobody is fully formed.

to your younger self

Hang on in there, don’t give up. Believe in yourself and trust your instincts.

THE BUSINESS MODEL

Louise talked about her business having three key pillars: Outdoor arts – festivals and events; indoor - touring to theatres; and education work. The income generated from these sources alongside core funding supports the employment and development of the team year round so the dancers (and core team) skills grow with the artistic quality of the work - creating great ‘products’. It maintains their profile and supports the development of relationships by inviting stakeholders to shows. It’s built on a foundation of relationships: internal, audiences and external.



AUTIN DANCE THEATRE



CASE STUDY

Out Of The Deep Blue. Photo - Dani Blower

Company name	Autin Dance Theatre
Director	Johnny Autin
Company Number	0824986
Founded	Started 2013, incorporated June 2017
Legal Structure	Community Interest Company (CIC)
Turnover	2022 £178K 2023 £350K
Board	5
Employees	2
Freelancers	15-22+ (32 trained for EKO)
Volunteers	occasionally
Main Artform	Dance/Puppetry Multidisciplinary
Space	Rented offices at Steamhouse. Dance Studios hired as needed www.autindt.co.uk

PROFILE

Autin Dance Theatre is a collaborative ensemble of creatives who devise & produce aspirational, socially engaged & mass participatory movement projects regionally & internationally. Autin Dance Theatre's distinctive artistic voice draws on contemporary social issues (environment, community, relationships & identities) to make engaging, accessible, relevant performance work.

WHO

A team of freelance creatives, led by Johnny Autin, Creative Director.

WHY

We bring different communities together in movement.

HOW

By devising and producing, beautiful, visual, socially engaged performances and telling stories with movement that address societal issues.

WHAT

In Mass participatory movement based performances, Touring arts shows to festivals, involving community in performance processions, education programme. Current offers: *Out of The Deep Blue*, *Parade*, *Dystopia*, Educational Programme, Book.

WHERE

At Mac, Big weekender, and Festivals UK/EU or linking through Brum Pro Class.

KEY POINTS on Company Journey and reflections on growth moments

- 1 Making the decision to stop any freelance work that didn't align with Autin DT values and aims & focusing all his energies on Autin DT
- 2 Employing a producer, who helped with company management such as keeping on timeline for application deadlines, building trust with collaborators & a strategic overview, this led to winning more proposals and feeding the funds to keep the producer paid
- 3 Covid: *Out of the Deep Blue*, their current and successful touring piece that grew out of the pandemic. When everything stopped it offered reflection and development time, cultural recovery funds to work on puppetry and develop the ambition to come back big!
- 4 Learning to lean into the support from the team more, rather than trying to do everything himself, is building a strong 'work family' that takes the company forwards.

KEY TAKE AWAYS From interview

- 1 Personal attributes of a growth mindset, and being willing to take risks by trying and putting work out there, evolving it, and learning as a company to make it better.
- 2 Recognising that social justice – Johnny is trained as a lawyer – is an important part of his artistic practice and how to feed this into, how to be the change, rather than political messaging. Seeking to move people in an artistic beautiful way without being too descriptive or pointing fingers.
- 3 Learning to work the shows and get as much life out of them for longevity and company profile. Positive life ran from 2016-2021 with successive grants. *Out of the Deep Blue* developed to have 2 casts out simultaneously and is continuing to take bookings, UK and internationally.
- 4 Finding 'his lane' with working with giant puppets, he's always liked mixing things artistically and this expertise is drawing Johnny into other commissions as a puppet director, including Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony 2022.
- 5 Managing Risks: Financial challenges as the margins are so tight, if something breaks, and this adds costs to repair/replace. Keeping on top of the non-negotiables for health and safety elements when life is at risk, or looking after audiences if they respond in a traumatic way or be triggered by the work negatively.
- 6 Conscious of the precariousness of the business model – its all based on the earned income across the summer, that keeps the company going through the winter and supports the RND for the next show. The next show needs to be good and meet the trust programmers are placing in committing to it, as if bookings fall then the business model stops functioning well.

ADVICE for those on their journey

If your about making the work, make the work, do good work. Research, develop, test and embed and try again and test it again. Just keep doing it. If you're managing a company you need to make it about the people and then the work that those people are making"

I wanted to be a choreographer a director, and also to be a performer in it. I started as a dance company, and now we doing multidisciplinary outdoor stuff. It just really OK. Its ok to change, to evolve, to shift, as long as your led by something you really believe in"

Never say no to a gig⁴. Always leave an impeccable reputation.

Invest in building relationships, for example following the interview, Johnny was about to travel to an outdoor arts conference in Paris.

“Being a company director is very different from being a creator/artist. They are two different journeys, two different skills, but one can help and enable you to do the other.”

TOOLS

Check in Check out at end of the day, Weekly team meetings. Annual Freelancer survey Seasonal company, need to keep an eye on the cash flow to stay a float by jan/feb before touring starts again.

REMINDERS

Breath. Lean on the Team, we'll all do it together. Be a kind person. "Bringing people together, when they smile and are transported by the work and their brains are trying to make sense of it to give it life when they watch the show, that gives me joy."

POSTCARD

to your younger self

You've got this, trust the process. Pay attention: notice. See the stuff, open your eyes, notice, pay attention, because our greatest successes are only great because they are unique to us. And they are unique to what we notice, what we paid attention to.

⁴ Johnny is not advocating working for free or below the costs needed, but to structure ways (eg second cast) to have capacity to service demand for the shows.

HOW TO CONNECT

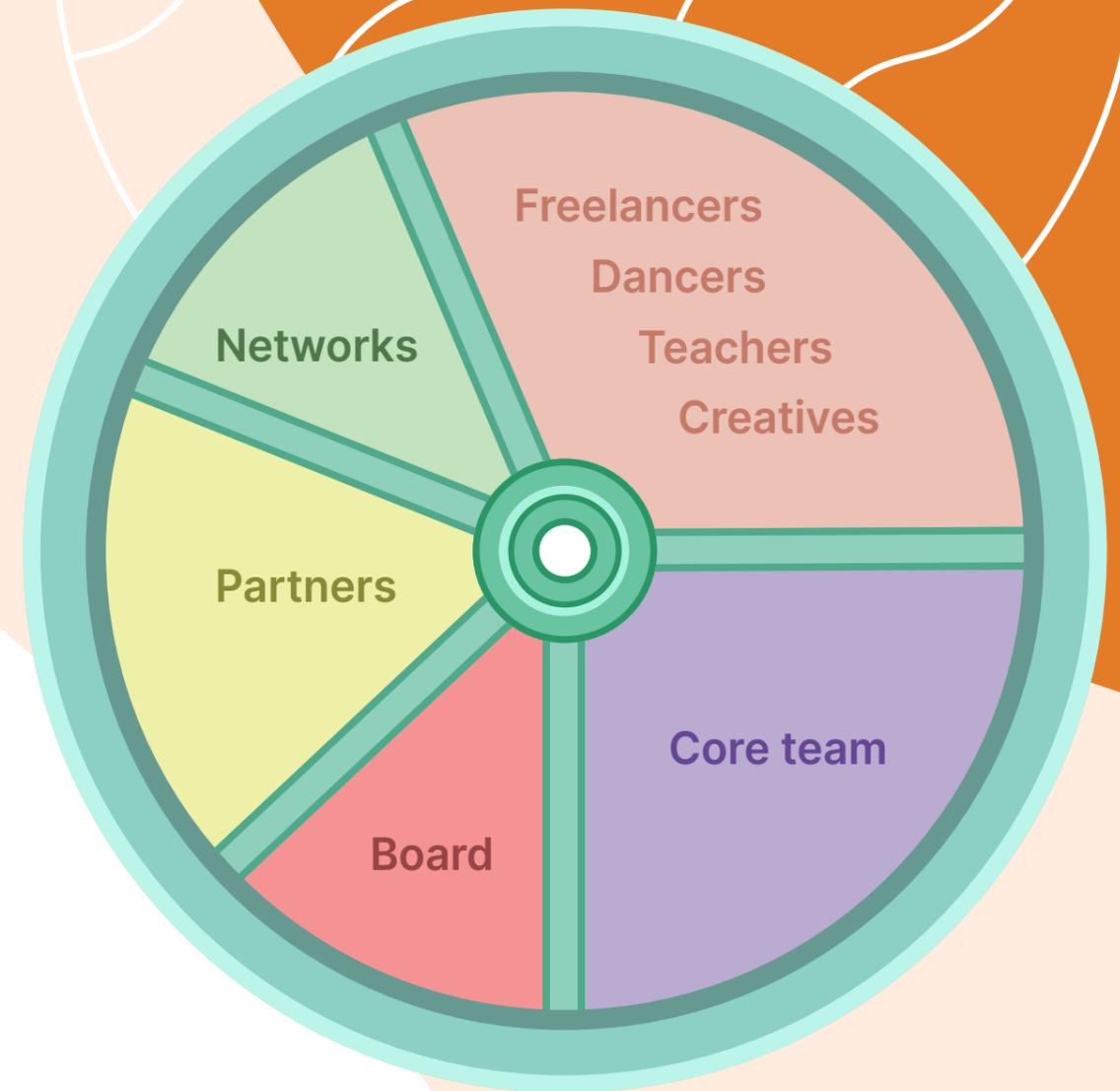
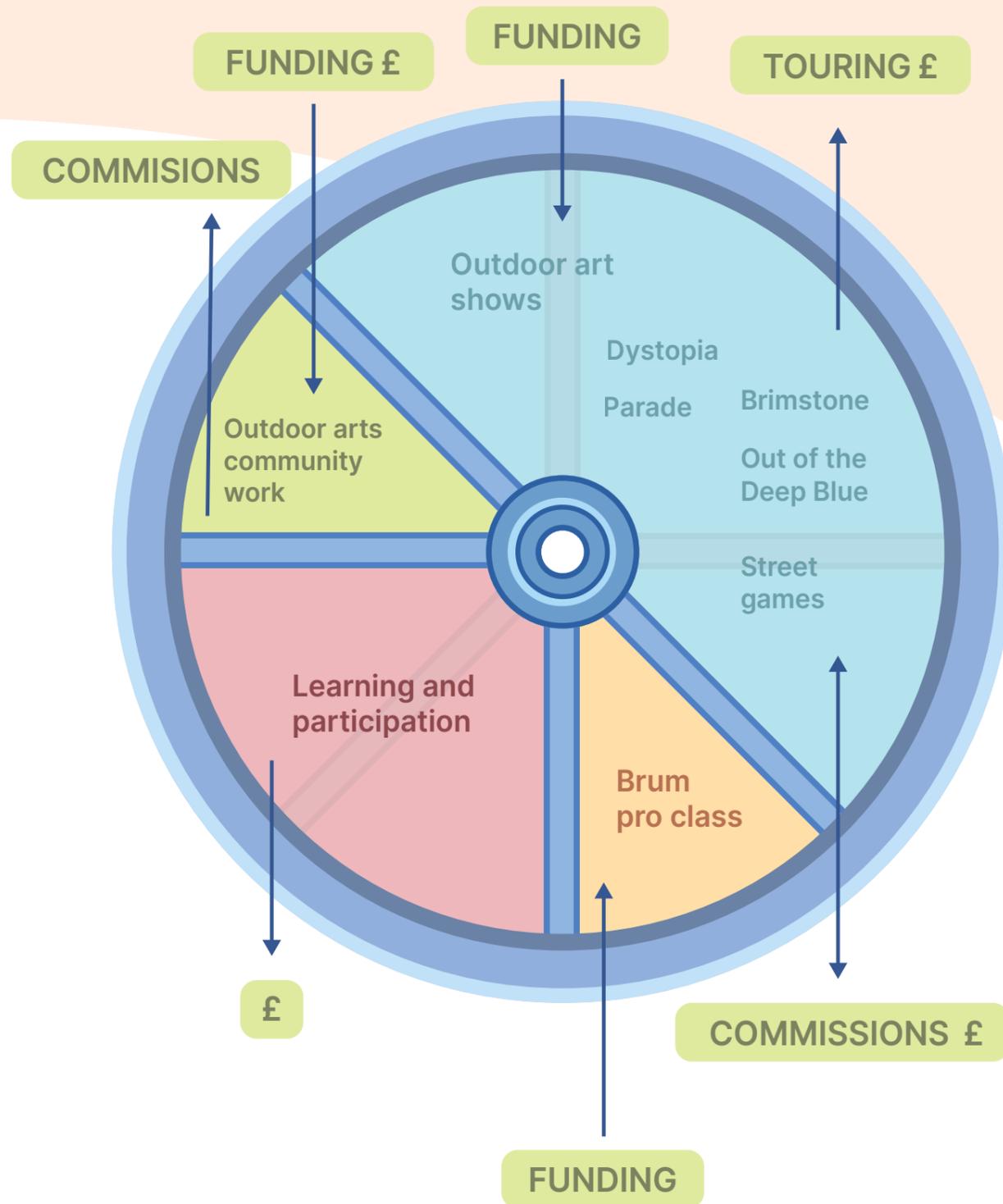
Core/office support via recommendations for consultancy. Via Internship, company members have started from an internship with the company. Open call outs, recommendations with auditions for performers. Informal talent scouting at Professional class (Brum Pro Class and elsewhere).

WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR?

With outdoor arts touring you need to be up for stepping into everything, there's vans to pack, driving, set up etc. I'm looking for people who are willing to do what it takes to make it happen and have a good time doing it.

THE BUSINESS MODEL

Johnny views his business model like a wheel. On one side are the people, on the other are the shows and services, the income from these link the two sides together. It supports the core team, along with education work, through the non-touring months and keeps the wheel turning.



NOFIT STATE CIRCUS

CASE STUDY

Sabotage. Photo - Mark Robson

Company name	NoFit State Circus
Director	Tom Rack, Artistic Director. Alison Woods Exec Director
Company Number	03180348 & Trading subsidiary: Nofit State Circus Trading Ltd
Founded	1986
Legal Structure	Charity number 1102850
Turnover	c. £1.5m (2022)
Public funding	Arts Council England NPO, Arts Council Wales Portfolio, ACE PG + trusts total c.
Board	6 trustees
Employees	30
Freelancers	c. 30 on tour
Volunteers	wide range
Main Artform	Contemporary Circus
Space	Converted Church rented at £1 pa + big top touring www.nofitstate.org

PROFILE

Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things. NoFit State is the UK's leading large-scale contemporary circus company, producing professional touring productions and a wide variety of community, training, and education projects for all ages.

WHO

Tom Rack, Artistic Director. Alison Woods Exec Director & team for core staff + performers.

WHY

Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things. We believe Circus is the spirit of a company that works together, lives together, travels together, eats and breathes together as one community. This creates the spirit that is NoFit State and gives the work its heart and soul.

HOW

We create and tour large scale contemporary circus shows, actively engage with communities and offer opportunities for participation, and professional training at the circus village.

WHAT

Sabotage is the current touring production, *Imagine Bamboo* in development, community programme, circus village.

WHERE

Based in Cardiff, touring internationally.

KEY POINTS

on Company Journey and reflections on growth moments

- 1** The company started as 5 friends, recent graduates who came together to create a little street show to raise money for Live Aid in 1986. They then spent 10 years slowly developing their craft, touring and living on the road, reliant on ticket sales with little or no funding as Arts Councils' classified Circus as commercial or a sport.
- 2** 1997 following launch of National Lottery funding, enabled injection of cash and more ambitious projects. This forced organisational development from working out of a back bedroom, project based, to grow with professional input: directors, producers, multi partner projects. At this point they were putting on Big Community Shows, and made a decision to be based in Cardiff (led too by life stages of company founders) getting a disused church space as a company base.
- 3** 2006 The community project and participatory performances transformed into professional performing touring productions. They took the show to Edinburgh and secured 2 years of international bookings on this. Behind this there was the development of back office to support it, led by Alison.

- 4** The following period, some of the company founders moved on and they refined their artistic process for creating great shows. What makes great work? "It is something deeply embedded in personal relationships, the productive creative tension within the creative team. A degree of ruthlessness, to say its not good enough, go back to the drawing board and not accepting 'ok' work."
- 5** Their production cycle takes two years to build a show, to get to premiere. Performers are Employed for 7-9 months of the year as freelancers, usually year to year over production lifespan. Productions tour four or five years and the profits from ticket sales over this period are reserved for the next production. They work with partners on a buyout, split deal and self promotion for shows. Having a Big Top for touring allows for self-promotion in some places.

KEY TAKE AWAYS

From interview

- 1** There is a willingness to face bankruptcy on a regular basis to make shows – by taking a calculated risks. The company In the 2006 period, commission funding to make shows, international touring years 2-4 profits cover core costs. Then more co-production/ commissions to create next show over this period. 2007 banking crisis put a lot of pressure on this. Co-producing and commissioning money available declined significantly, Fee levels in Europe declined. So they lobbied over a number of years to become part of the national portfolio (NPO).
- 2** 2012 Became part of Arts Council Wales National portfolio and development of their "Resilience model" which was 100% of production money from Arts council to make show, Running on touring profit for subsequent income/core and to build up reserves to build the new show. Previously would start opening night at £0 rather than in deficit to the companys internal balance sheet. Ran well as a model till 2020 Covid. Had already invested c. £120K in RnD for the new show which needed to be written off.
- 3** Partnerships – *Block* with Motion-house has been a really successful partnership that arose out of NoFit team having an idea and looking for a director in Kevin Finnan, but gaining a partnership with the company.
- 4** How projects happen: NFS initiates and idea, and then looks for a partner. Through a series of conversation an idea starts to coalesce, and we start working together to create it. A personal connection, lets find something that we could do together to have fun.
- 5** Venue space (and big top as their touring venue) feeds into the company structure as it gives a development space, community programme and base from which to run local community work that is 100% funded, mostly free to community and cost of living crisis support like free foods at events.
- 6** NPO funding covers c.2/3 of core costs and overheads. No contribution to programme at all. From analysis in 2000, Ali looked at all the companies doing great work, and their funding. All had high level of risk. Core funding only covering 65-80% of core costs. Risk drives quality.
- 7** Significant proportion of turnover comes from outside UK market.

ADVICE

for those on their journey

Find friends, find mentors, find partners, find people that you trust. You know more than you know you know. You probably have the answers, you just haven't found the questions yet. You have known knowns, known unknowns and unknown unknowns.

(Donald Rumsfeld) Ali has three boxes on her desk, and checks to see if current concerns are in the right box. The Father Ted question – how do you know whether something [eg an issue] looks small because it is small, or because it is a far away?

“Don't think business is about money. Business is about relationships, and the money is the oil. If you're going on a journey and all you think of is about the oil in the engine and not the map, you're not going to get very far”

REFLECTIONS

Health and Safety Comes first.

Recognise that stability is short lived: in early stages core was only for 1 year for 3.5 people. Do not become constrained or trapped by now. Do not become dependent on now.

Making sure you don't stay in a bubble, take time to understanding the world and being able to flex and respond to the world around. Taking in a wide source of info to temperature take: whats trending on socials, bank of England reports, chatting to people from those in your network to those in the pub every so often.

HOW TO CONNECT

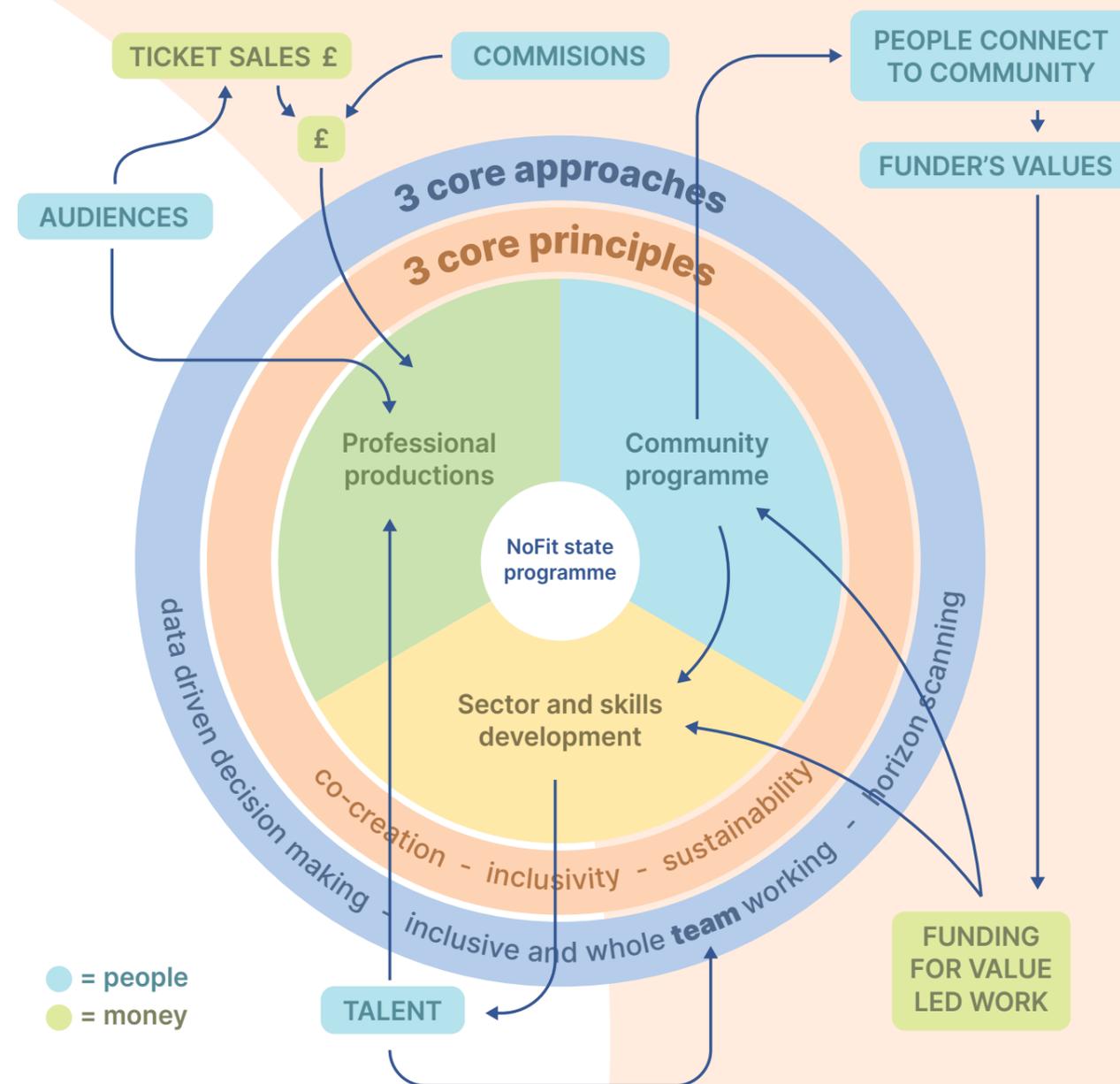
Through auditions and call outs, via the community programme, as a volunteer, as a performer at circus village.

THE BUSINESS MODEL

Big Top Touring and Highly Localised Community Work Model

NoFit State's Why? Is about People. So they draw their business model based on values. They say "Everything NoFit State do is delivered through three core programmes strands, shaped by three core principles,

and driven by three core approaches". Adding to this model the finance and routes for people, give a flow of how each part of the business interrelates.





ELOQUENT DANCE COMPANY

CASE STUDY

Eloquent Dance Co. performing at Festival 23 Photo - Eloquent Dance Co.

Company name	Eloquent Praise and Empowerment Dance Company
Director	Romanah Buchanan, Janice Davis, Nathaniel Turner
Company number	10404870
Founded	Started 2014, incorporated October 2016
Legal structure	Private Ltd Co. By Guarantee Community Interest Company (CIC)
Turnover	2021-2 c.£250K 2022-3 £c.290K
Public funding	50%
Board	6 youth advisory
Employees	5
Freelancers	15+
Volunteers	15 to support events
Main artform	Dance
Young people	200 at the academy. 450 over the week with schools work.
Space	Eloquent Dance Studios in Aston. Rented long term. www.eloquent.org.uk

PROFILE

Eloquent Praise Dance Co, empowers young people through dance and the arts to impact on their lives, through mentoring, dance and performing arts training and shows.

WHO

Romanah + directors lead a team of freelance dancers.

WHY

We empower young people and build community to understand their gifts and unleash their full potential, finding their unique voice through the arts.

HOW

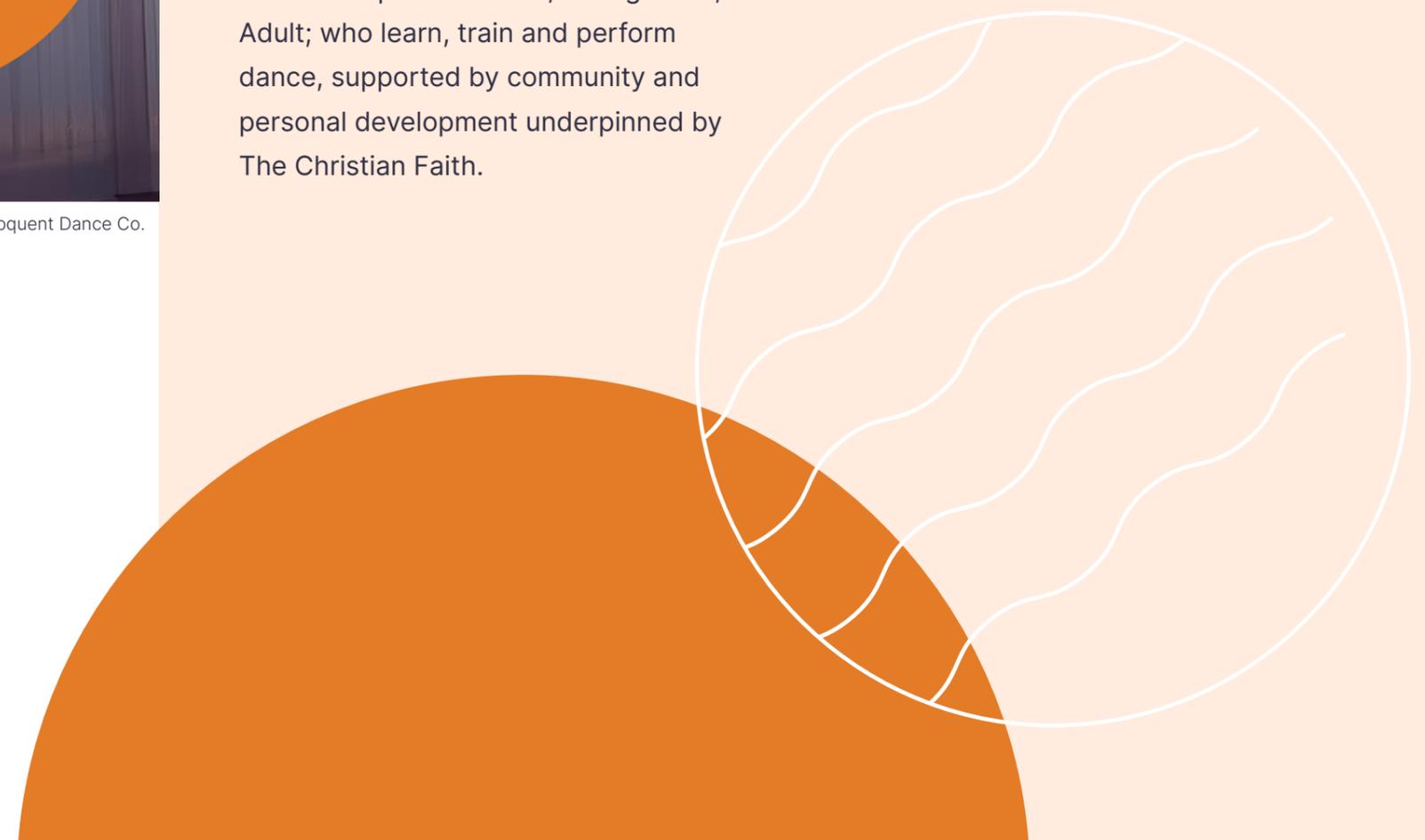
By running a youth academy and three dance companies: Youth, Young Adult, Adult; who learn, train and perform dance, supported by community and personal development underpinned by The Christian Faith.

WHAT

In weekly dance classes, podcasting & music, performances, events, schools programme, mentoring and talent agency.

WHERE

At their studios in Aston, regional festivals like Big Weekender & Festival 23.



KEY POINTS

on Company Journey and reflections on growth moments

- 1** First Steps of hiring spaces moving studio to studio developed a class following, and the instability of this led to the need to have a single place to base activity from and taking on their first studio in Hockley.
- 2** Covid led to moving and taking on new studios in Aston, refurbishing during lockdown ready for a leap forward as activities resumed.

- 3** Black Lives Matter Protests were pivotal as their work is fused around social issues and it brought home a recognition that the community needs nurturing, protecting, advocacy and a need to respond to these events creatively, in performance.

KEY TAKE AWAYS

From interview

- 1** “In the Black community, parents don’t see dance as something that they can make an actual living out of, it’s spoken down on. So when we’re able to kind of counteract that [by offering] this job for X amount of months. Prove to them that yeah, they can make a living out of this and do really well”.
- 2** Joyful moments of seeing dancers who started with the company at 10 years old, now performing professionally, gaining freelance work from the company and showing them how they can make a career out of their dancing.

- 3** Overcoming adversity and uncertainty when things don’t a certain way, is addressed by always having different options, a plan B and an attitude that we’re creatives, we make it work.
- 4** Faith is the foundation, there’s a chaplain, regular time for reflection, a prayer box, mentoring or time for parents to stop in and have a chat, that helps form company culture.

ADVICE

for those on their journey

Be patient with yourself. Address the areas you are weak and don’t have much knowledge, seek mentors, courses and upskill yourself. You don’t have to be great at everything that’s fine.

TOOLS

Using a Vision Traction Organiser (VTO) a template of Rocks Pebbles Sand, that helps articulate the big rocks – three big problems that we are working on, underneath this broken down into small pebbles, so they are continually small things that are easy to overcome, that gets us closer to our vision.

Actuals: what’s in the bank now, what do actually need to make this happen? Using the accountant to help this, as everything starts with finances. No decision should be made without actually looking at the budgets and finances first to see if it possible.

HOW TO CONNECT

Recruitment campaigns. Growing up through the academy/class programme. What we look for in people. Purpose driven, Passion, Character – the motivation that makes you come back to the office after a difficult day. This is as important as your dance talent and experience. What we offer to employees/freelancers is that bit extra to help you grow like empowerment sessions, motivational speakers.

“Our company’s forever evolving and growing, and there are periods when I think why didn’t I introduce this sooner, so be patient with yourself as a company founder.”

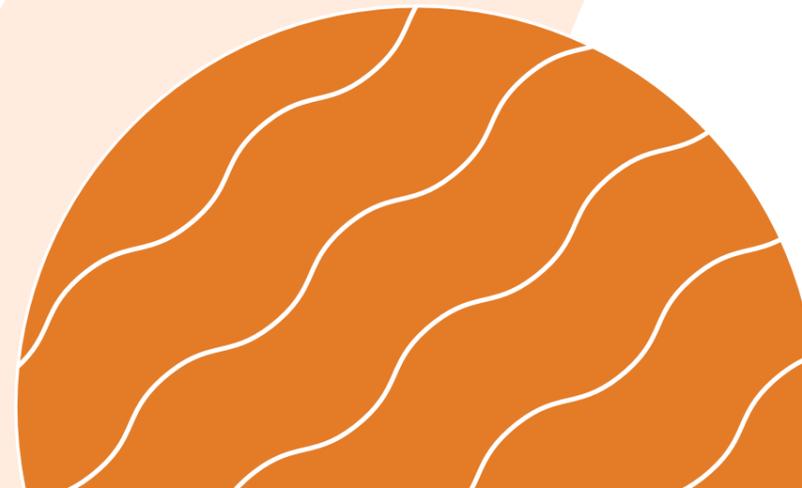
REMINDERS

Having a little reminder like a key ring, a picture on your phone, about the essence, why you started this to trigger you, to remind yourself, when things are in those challenging elements.

POSTCARD

to your younger self

Past: develop the areas your less advanced in sooner as it will prepare for my growth much quicker.

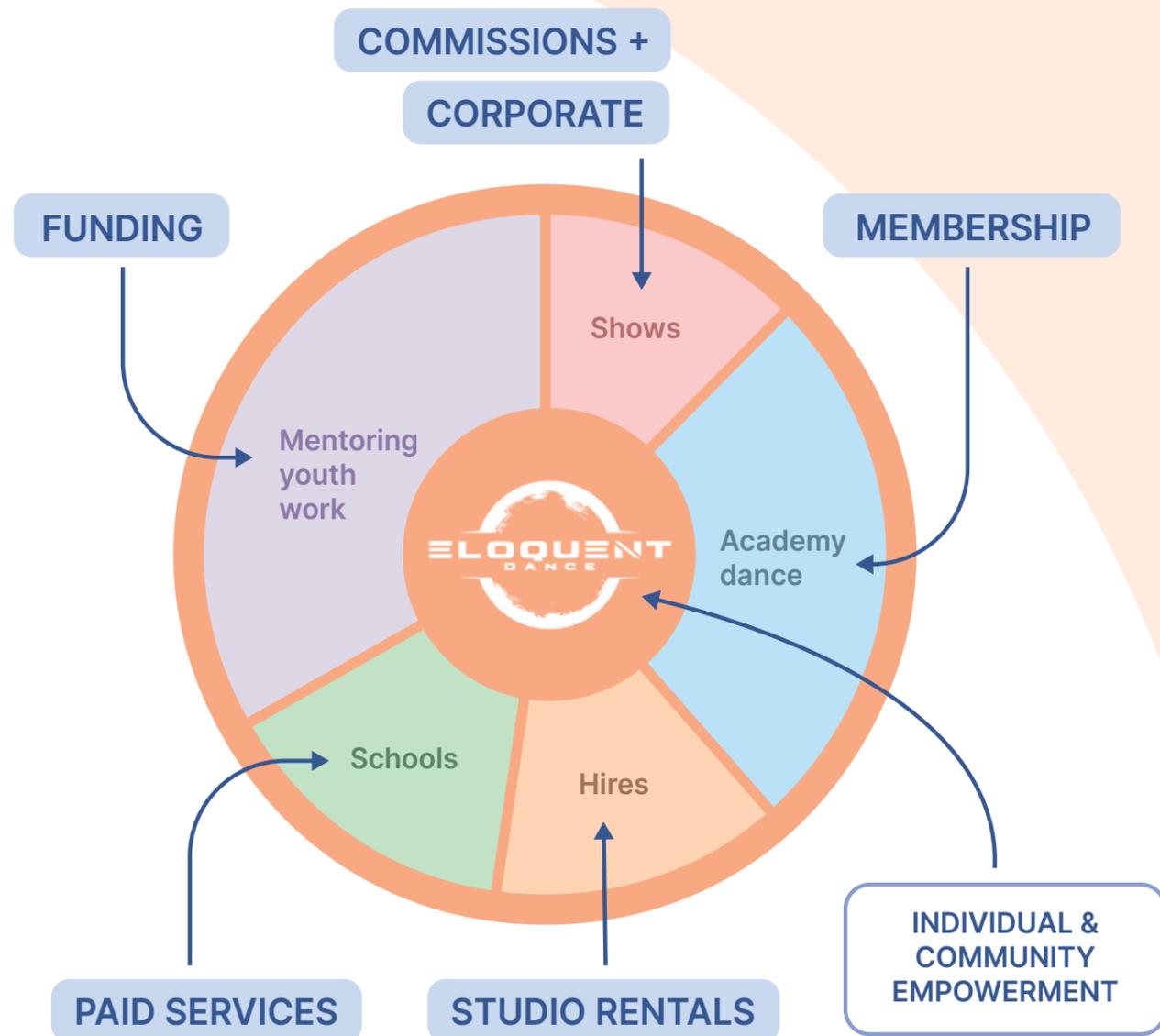


THE BUSINESS MODEL

A Teaching Academy Model

Romanah talked about her business model as a piechart with the different income segments of the business. Trading is the key part of the income that keeps the business stable, from memberships, schools income, corporate and commissions for shows and space hires. Fundraising is for social

justice work, mentoring, empowerment, community building and often non-dance activity. Recently this has been NLF, A4A, youth music, Big Issue Invest, Birmingham CC via Commonwealth Games Fund, and is c.50% of income. This helps cover free activities offered to enable youth empowerment to impact on social issues like knife crime. At the centre of this model is the Eloquent Dance Co's Why of Dance, Empowerment and Community.





MERCURIAL DANCE

CASE STUDY

Retold. Photo - Nicola Young

Company name	Mercurial Dance Ltd	Mercurial Arts Charity
Director	Oliver Scott	-
Company Number	05014680	06635326
Founded	2004	2008
Legal Structure	Limited by shares	Charity, (limited by guarantee)
Turnover	combined c.£195,000 2022	-
Board	4	-
Employees	1	0
Freelancers	6-12	varies
Volunteers	varies	-
Main Artform	Dance & Digital arts	-
Space	no www.mercurialdance.co.uk	-

PROFILE

We move people. Mercurial Dance creates inventive immersive performance and produces in-depth participatory experiences. We have expertise in immersive digital production in AR/XR/VR. We take a co-design approach to making new work for family audiences.

WHO

Creative Director Oliver Scott, with producing team leads a group of freelance artists to deliver the company offer.

WHY

We're passionate about getting people moved and moving in dance. We believe that by connecting young people to dance and the arts their lives will be enriched and healthier.

WHERE

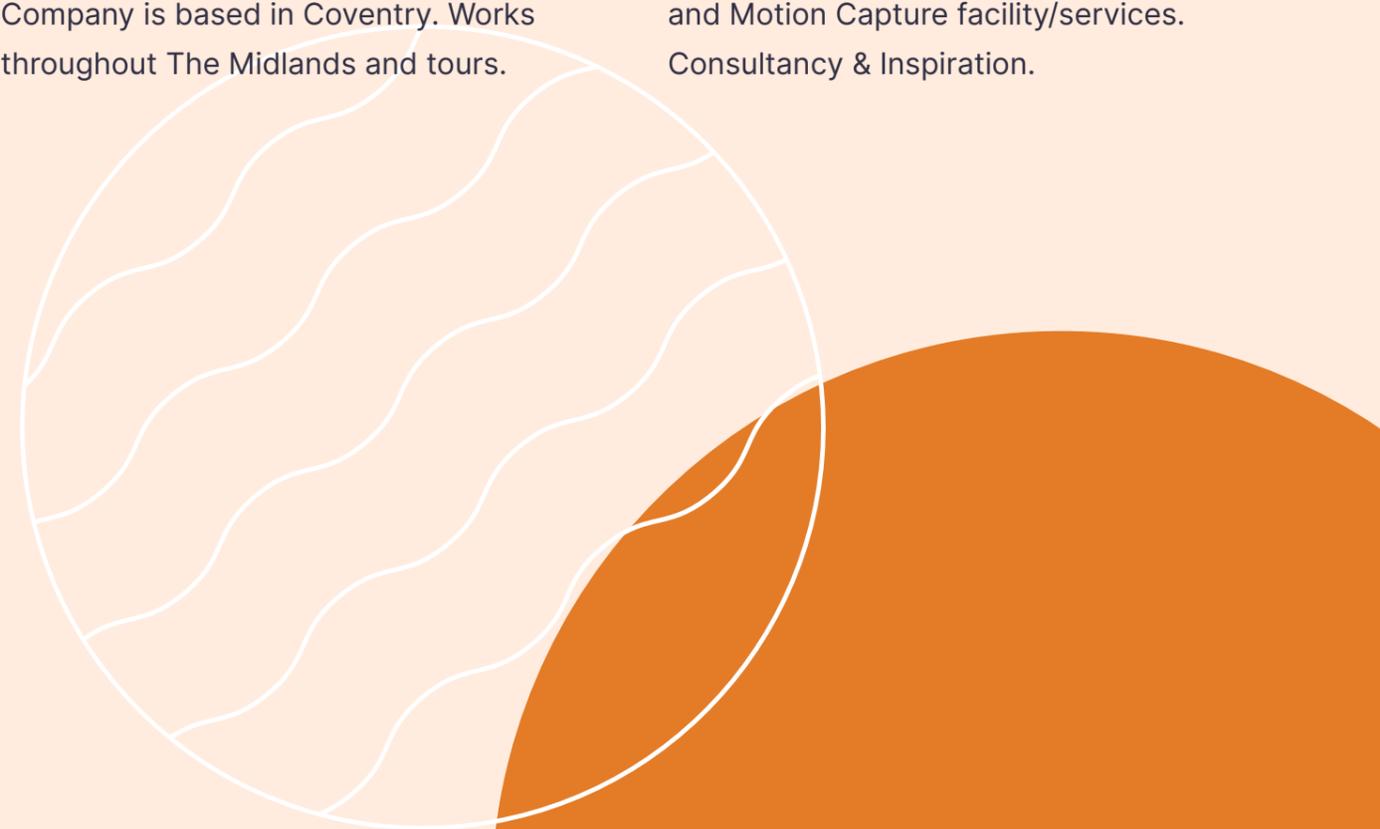
Company is based in Coventry. Works throughout The Midlands and tours.

HOW

We create outdoor arts shows, immersive digital content and run a multi art form education outreach programme in schools and communities.

WHAT

Fame Game™ an XR outdoor adventure game. EmbodyXR® immersive Virtual Reality work touring 2024. New outdoor show tba. Services to schools as Every Child Is An Artist and Aspire! Arts education programmes. We offer movement direction and Motion Capture facility/services. Consultancy & Inspiration.



KEY POINTS on Company Journey and reflections on growth moments

- 1** Integrated Ensembles. I launched the company our first major commission in 2006, an immersive dance film installation at the Leamington Gallery, co-created with young dancers and filmmakers. I was interested in mixing dance and technology and creating immersive work, collaborating with other artists to achieve this. Our first business model using integrated professional and participatory ensembles, in collaboration with regional venues.
- 2** Regeneration. Between 2006 and 2013 we operated on a project funded basis and 2010-3 initiated The Bubble Chamber, a pop-up venue for performance and digital art in empty shops. This enabled the company to get spaces for free and create a series of interactive digital dance performance works for all age groups. We hosted other artists and creatives in the space and helped to change the City Council's thinking about arts led regeneration of empty spaces.
- 3** Business Challenge. As the Bubble Chamber project concluded in 2013, the business met some challenges. The austerity agenda in national politics was having local impacts. Cuts to services, a local festival we depended on ceased, and some of our schools' work stopped. With an increase in competitiveness for funding put pressure on the business. I took some time to re-focus the business model and goals.
- 4** Producers and Partnerships. In 2014 we secured a long-term partnership with a primary school in Birmingham, becoming a company in residence. The steady income and community to generate projects alongside, enabled us to become known in that area, helped resource and commit long term to a producer. Pop up performances were regenerating the community centre and we were developing partnerships on their behalf with city venues. The stability and partnership working opened up the next phase of company development.
- 5** Increasing Artistic Ambition. 2018. The learning from partnership development, with stability enabled me to contribute to the visioning for Coventry as City of Culture. We secured a major commission to take over a former Evening Telegraph News headquarters and print works in the city in partnership with the Belgrade Theatre, concept directing the Education team and creating our show Retold. This live, site specific dance and text piece artistically moved the company forward, fusing dance, text and live music in this iconic industrial building.
- 6** Covid: A pandemic upturn and super busy period. Innovating digitally, we moved online streaming our schools work, producing weekly tutorials and supporting our partners through their digital journey. As we work with vulnerable and keyworker children, we saw the need increase. Raising funds to service this, we were back face to face as soon as regulations allowed. We evolved the business digitally launching our XR ambitions.

7 Fame Game. 2021. Our audiences were being held by festivals or venues which had closed, highlighting the fragility and dependence of the business model on an arts sector that had stopped working. ACE cultural recovery funding helped us evolve artistically, and move into immersive digital work. We created Fame Game, an outdoor XR game played on mobile phones. We explore digital formats that are not linked to traditional theatre audiences.

8 Investing in Tech! Supported by business innovation funds, we are creating a new VR and new AR experience. Developing new business models we are offering new services, with fun, accessible Motion Capture facilities. We collaborate with other artists to realise their ambitions in digital.

KEY TAKE AWAYS From interview

- 1** We are ideas and concepts led, and fit in opportunities to develop the business alongside artistic practice of the AD through partnerships.
- 2** Two identities: Commercially focused Mercurial Dance, and social change focused Charity Mercurial Arts align around common benefit for young people, and open different finance routes for specific projects. Civic funding brought in to reach recently arrived refugee children in Coventry with digital dance workshops through Mercurial Arts; and business innovation funds for digital product innovation through Mercurial Dance.
- 3** Taking a freelance employment structure has shielded the company from financial risks/shocks. The challenge is retaining a team that we have trained through a project model focus; and benefits from new skills from employing freelancers.
- 4** Business growth has been linked to finding ways to support and develop capacity and keep growing.
- 5** Through a responsive approach to opportunity, the company has developed a wide ranging expertise to support the variety of our work: cross artform collaboration, business expertise, project management, education sector expertise and a deeply held commitment to research based practice underpinned by our knowledge in dance and movement.

ADVICE

for those on their journey

"If I've taken the trouble to write a bid for a project or idea, and it's not successful, my attitude is that the idea is good, and it needs to happen, I've just not found the right place or way to pitch it yet. So refine and re-pitch it". First choreograph the team.

Then choreograph the dance. Plan ahead. Have a plan b and have a version that I can work on now. In conditioning my patience and resilience, I use little maxims to help understand where I am. One useful one is "it takes 7 points of contact to make a sale".

"I am hugely creative and always have a new idea. I keep a note of ideas that I have and when it circulates a few times, I should probably do something about making it happen."

HOW TO CONNECT POSTCARD

Auditions, open calls, recruitment campaigns. Referrals, recommendations and direct approaches. Sending your CV with a letter of introduction. Internships and placements (formal and informal)

to your younger self

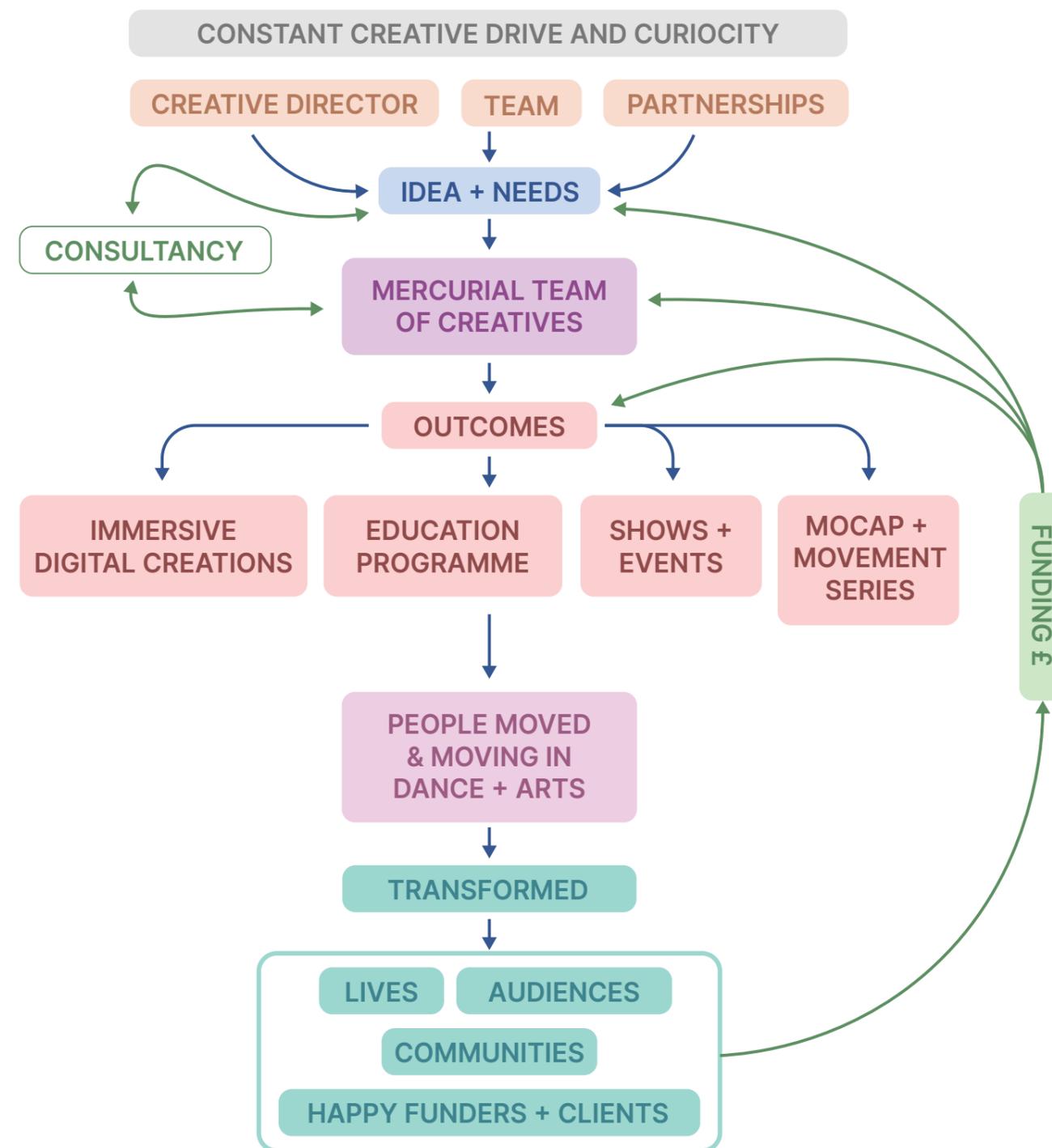
Be confident in asking for help and advice. Build and maintain your professional relationships.

THE BUSINESS MODEL

Constantly Creatively Curious and Continuous Outcomes

The business is driven by two key elements: Ideas - a spirit of being constantly creatively curious; and as a creative director/producing team and finding resourceful ways to make new ideas a reality. Needs - income streams generated by servicing clients and communities needs and opportunities, through co-commissions, education services and

consultancy services. This keeps the core creative team together year-round to invest in the project development and realisation. Our Outcomes models seeks to fulfil our Why? Of people moved and moving in dance and the arts, which enables social outcomes that the clients, trusts and foundations invest in.





Author Oliver Scott, MBA SMLDA
Produced by Mercurial Dance for The Dance Leaders Group
Published 2023



This work is licenced under a creative commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0
International. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 Deed.
<https://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en>

<https://www.danceleadersgroup.co.uk/>
[#DanceLeadersGroup](#)