

Exhibition Project Proposal

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Fundraising and Development Class Assignment

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Executive Summary

The mission of the Museum of Pop Culture in Philadelphia (MoPOP) is to engage the public with trends in culture over time by presenting art, literature, film, television, music, and fashion as agents of change that have influenced Philadelphia, the nation, and the world.

The exhibition *Twist, Shuffle, Dougie!* will invite Philadelphians, specifically teenagers (ages 13-19) and young adults (20-30), to explore a broad history of popular dance styles spanning 100 years, from the 1900s through the present day. The exhibition will be colorful, immersive, and full of movement: dancing is highly encouraged! Visitors will not only be able to access historical information about the origins of dance styles through text, artifacts from the MoPOP collection, and full-body interactives, but they will also understand how those styles reflect the changing values of a culture that is constantly in flux.

Statement of Need

The primary impact of *Twist, Shuffle, Dougie!* will be a greater awareness of the social issues that are intrinsic to popular styles of dance. Teens will be able to juxtapose the dances and music they know with dance and music of the past - this kind of historical context will enable them to see familiar trends in a more critical light and as part of a constantly evolving tapestry of human creativity. For example, as teens learn about how dance has consistently challenged old-fashioned notions of gender and sexuality (as the Flappers did in the 1920s when they expressed their independence through solo dances), they will be able to reflect on what sorts of messages are embedded in dance and music today. As conscious consumers of these fads, teens will be better equipped to recognize and respond to the underlying social issues.

Furthermore, scientific studies have proven the benefits of dance on mental health and physical health. One study shows its positive impact on the self esteem of teenage girls¹, while another shows that dancing is the only physical activity that can reduce the risk of dementia in the elderly.² Dancing as a form of communication and connection may even have been a factor in the success

¹ Anna Duberg, RPT, Lars Hagberg, PhD, et al. "Influencing Self-rated Health Among Adolescent Girls With Dance Intervention: A Randomized Controlled Trial." *JAMA Pediatrics*. 167.1 (2013). Web. 8 Nov. 2013. <<http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1390784&resultClick=3>>.

² Joe Verghese, M.D., Richard B. Lipton, M.D., et al. "Leisure Activities and the Risk of Dementia in the Elderly." *New England Journal of Medicine*. (2003). Web. 8 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa022252>>

of prehistoric humans (Whipps).³ The ancillary benefits of engaging in this exhibition will be enhanced self esteem and the feeling of well-being experienced during dancing.

Exhibition Summary

The exhibition *Twist, Shuffle, Dougie!* celebrates the history of popular dance in the United States, outlining its evolution over the past 100 years and revealing its role as a measure of cultural change.

Goals:

This exhibit will encourage visitors to think critically about styles of dance, placing each within a historical context. Music and fashion have evolved alongside dance, and these elements will provide visual and aural points of connection for visitors who may be more familiar with these means of expression. A major educational goal of the exhibition is to reveal how new dance styles have historically pushed the limits of cultural attitudes toward sexuality and gender. The content will not shy away from politicized subject matter, though ultimately visitors will be able to come to their own conclusions. Through graphics and text, the exhibition will illuminate a history of cultural appropriation in music and the arts. As visitors make their way through the exhibition, they will be presented with many examples of dance trends that originated in social spaces belonging to marginalized ethnic and cultural groups, and they will see how those trends are picked up by the dominant culture and popularized for white audiences (and dancers).

Approach:

Twist, Shuffle, Dougie! is an exhibition developed and designed for a roughly 2,500 square-foot space. The exhibition is organized by decade, with ten distinct areas where visitors will learn about iconic popular dances and how they have symbolized cultural change. These ten areas are arranged around a central hub that serves as both an orientation space and gathering space with seating as well as a dance floor. As visitors make their way through the decades (either in a linear or random path), they will return to the hub each time they cross from one decade into another.

The content in the exhibition will be available in a variety of formats, to suit the learning styles of a range of ages. The main idea in each decade section will be addressed by text panels and reader rails, videos demonstrating the dances, cases containing fashion and material culture associated with the time period, and a multimedia dance interactive. Speakers in the floor are directional, so the music associated with the decades can only be heard when standing in a discrete area. This will allow lots of sound to co-exist in a contained area without becoming muddy.

This exhibition relies heavily on multimedia interactives that will get visitors dancing within the exhibition itself. Each dance interactive utilizes the Kinect motion-sensing device (developed for Xbox "Dance Central" and "Just Dance" video games) so that visitors can fully engage in step-by-step tutorials for each dance style. These interactives can be engaged by 1-3 "players." The goal of the dance interactives is to absorb visitors completely in following the movements of the on-screen dancer. The format will be familiar to anyone who has played the Xbox video games, which will help visitors, especially teens, feel less inhibited.

³ Heather Whipps, "Survival Dance: How Humans Waltzed Through the Ice Age," LiveScience, (2006). Web. 8 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.livescience.com/619-survival-dance-humans-waltzed-ice-age.html>>.

Each dance interactive takes place in a dance booth, a space that is semi-enclosed within each decade section. The dance booth, although private, will be paired with a large touchscreen outside of the enclosed area. As visitors walk through the decade sections, they will be able to watch the dances that other visitors have recorded and shared on the monitors. Once visitors have completed an interactive cycle in the dance booth they will have the option of sharing their video on the monitor outside or sending the video to an email address. The feeling of privacy within the dance booths, as well as the element of control over who sees their video, will help many visitors feel uninhibited about participating in the dance interactives. Whether or not visitors participate in the dance interactives, they will be able to watch the videos of past visitors who have chosen to share them.

The central hub also includes a large, open area that will be occupied by regular dance tutorials with a student staff member. Some visitors may not be interested in the multimedia dance interactive, and they will have the opportunity to learn the same dances from local high school students who have the expertise to teach others simple dance steps. These lessons will take place every half-hour, and each will cover a specific dance addressed in the exhibition.

Gestalt:

Twist, Shuffle, Dougie! will be a lively experience for visitors whether they participate in the dance interactives or not. The video monitors displaying visitors dancing will be a visual anchor throughout the exhibition. The motion will attract clusters of visitors, and this activity will in turn heighten the feeling of excitement in the exhibition.

The lighting in the hub is dramatically low, creating a calmer feeling. This will allow people to feel comfortable sitting for a while, whether it is to wait for a friend or take in the action around them. This exhibit also relies on larger-than-life photographs of dancers throughout the past 100 years to set the stage and ambience for each section. Music will be used extensively within the hub and each decade area to evoke the time period.

In addition to the larger-than-life photographs, each decade section will recreate architectural elements from the places where dancing might have happened at the time. For example, in the 1920s section, a speakeasy setting will be evoked with a drop ceiling, low lighting, and faux brick walls. Visitors will feel as if they have entered an intimate, slightly illicit space. In the 1950s section, the architecture will include the linoleum floor, high ceiling, and stage lighting of the American Bandstand studio. Here, visitors will feel the excited, upbeat atmosphere of American Bandstand, compared to a “groovier” club vibe in the 1970s section, with its light-up dance floor. These architectural elements are meant to evoke a certain feeling rather than make a literal reference to a place.

Walkthrough

The exhibit will have a fairly open floor plan. The visitor will enter the exhibition through the hub, which provides sight lines into each decade area. The space of the hub is defined by a circular video timeline: this will be the first element the visitor will encounter, and it will provide a broad, visual overview of the evolution of popular dance styles. Each screen shows a loop of video of a single person or a couple dancing. Archival footage will be used depicting amateur dancers (rather than professional performers). Each clip is accompanied by a song popular during that time period, and can be listened to with headphones.

From afar, before focusing on one screen, the visitor will see a series of dancers in a visual exchange of styles, their movements merging into a timeless expression of the euphoria of dancing. This visual will put the visitor in the mood for dancing. Closer up, the video clips will show the evolution of dance styles, so that the visitor will be able to make connections on a broad, historical level. (For example, they will observe the connection between the Lindy Hop of the 1910s and the Jitterbug danced in later decades.)

As the visitor peruses the video timeline, they might be invited to learn the basic Jitterbug by a student staff member. There is a dance floor adjacent to the video timeline with squares outlined on the floor in a staggered pattern. These outlines create spots for visitors to stand, and limits the number of participants in each tutorial. After the tutorial, the staff member will encourage the visitors to learn more about that style of dance in the appropriate decade section.

Each decade section is arranged in a similar way with variations, so that the visitor can quickly understand the layout and visual language. At the entrance to each section, the visitor will see a panel with a life-size photograph of people performing a dance represented within the section. The date, in large, boldly-colored numbers, is visible above each photograph, providing an anchor to each area. These dates and photographs are visible from the hub, creating another visual timeline that spans the length of the exhibition and depicts the evolution of dance.

The visitor, interested in learning about the Charleston and flappers, heads to the 1920s section. As they peruse the clothing worn by trendy individuals, listen to the popular music, and try some of the dances for themselves, the visitor also learns that the Charleston, and other dances like the Shimmy, were considered risqué and even downright scandalous at the time. The visitor will simultaneously learn about the dance's African American origins (as a protest against Prohibition), and that the Charleston ushered in a new way of un-partnered dancing, representing the freedom and independence of the flapper generation. In reading about the mainstream reactions to these dances, the visitor will begin to think about popular dances today that may receive flak for the same reasons.

The visitor moves on, attracted to a large photograph of Madonna voguing in the 1990s section. At the back of the section is the interactive dance booth, and the wall in front of it displays the video footage of visitors doing their best renditions of voguing, popping and locking, and the Hammer Dance. The enthusiasm of the dancers, despite their wide range of skill, is inspiring and fun to watch. On graphic panels within the section, the visitor reads about the origins of these dance styles, learning, for example, that voguing originated in black and Latino drag queen culture of the 1980s. Cases embedded in the walls display clothing, boom boxes, footwear, and other items representing the time period.

In the last section, 2000-today, the visitor learns about the influence of the internet on dance styles, and explores possibilities for the next 100 years of dance. In the dance booth, the visitor is encouraged to make and record a dance move they imagine will be popular 100 years from now. Outside the booth, on the video monitor, each video is a thumbnail, and tiled so that the entire screen is filled with individual movements making up a whole picture of the future of dance. This space is clean and white, the sort of space one might find in a modern art museum: a space that is open to infinite possibilities. The visitor leaves the exhibition feeling inspired by the wealth of human creativity expressed through dance.

Examples of the dances that can be learned in each decade sections are as follows:

1910s: The Grizzly Bear, Fox Trot
1920s: Blackbottom, Charlston, Shimmy
1930s: Lindy Hop and Jitterbug
1940s: Rumba, Swing
1950s: Rock 'n' Roll dances, Mambo
1960s: Twist, Mod, Psychedelic
1970s: Disco
1980s: Breakdance, Moonwalk
1990s: Vogue, Popping and locking, Hammer Dance
2000-Today: Dougie, Gangnam, Twerk, influence of internet, etc.

Bibliography

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