

Insult to Injury?

By
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Benevolent Fund

Clemmie Cowl, of the Royal Ballet Benevolent Fund, responds to Dance UK's Dancers' Health Pilot Scheme and believes that without insurance, the road to recovery can be a rocky one.

One of the realities for any charity in today's funding climate is that, despite the establishment of our welfare state, including the National Health Service in 1948, calls for charitable assistance have not diminished, as it was predicted they would back then. In the case of injured dancers, for the Royal Ballet Benevolent Fund (RBBF) it is too often a case of picking up the pieces, rather than allow dancers' careers to be put in jeopardy because NHS healthcare is often too little or too late.

Given the limits of NHS provision, suitable insurance and therefore, access to private healthcare when needed is quite obviously the most common sense option. Yet it is worrying that the most often cited reason given by dancers for not taking out insurance is that it simply wasn't affordable. The RBBF's response to the Dance UK's Health Pilot Scheme (details of which can be found on the Dance UK website) highlights the difficult circumstances dancers can find themselves in if they do not have appropriate insurance cover. The simple reality is that dancers, if they are still working, cannot rely on receiving NHS treatment quickly. Step in the RBBF – which will help with the costs of treatment if necessary, but this situation is far from ideal. Firstly, there are over 200 dance companies employing dancers and there are set criteria for applying to the Fund so not all dancers who are in need of help will receive it; also the Fund's decisive factor is based on measured levels of hardship and not every case will be in this band. Secondly, the help can arrive too late – because as dancers

fear they will be unable to afford treatment they continue to perform on injuries, some quite old, until a situation occurs when they are, quite simply, forced to stop dancing. The knock on effect of this can be a serious impact on other areas of their lives, because any delay in treatment may increase the time to get back to peak condition and employment again. Ironically, the result can be that despite their attempts to deal with the problem themselves, professional dancers still end up in, what can seem, the rather ignominious position of having to ask for charitable assistance.

What's to be done? Well, as an organisation often being at the 'coalface' of the dancers' struggles, the RBBF welcomes Dance UK's vision for the research of the causes and prevention of dancers' injuries, and the setting up of a countrywide infrastructure of health provision, both which would hugely improve the dancer's lot. However, it welcomes most particularly the proposal to provide improved insurance cover for ballet and contemporary dancers. After all, most of us want to insure those things that are precious to us, and what is more precious to a dancer than their body?

The Fund will continue to help all dancers in need where possible. All UK ballet and contemporary dancers who are experiencing financial difficulties for one reason or another are welcome to apply to the Fund for assistance, and no application is considered too unimportant for consideration.

For more information on the work of the Royal Ballet Benevolent Fund, contact Clemmie Cowl on 01273 626548, clemmie.cowl@rbbf.org.uk, www.rbbf.org.uk

Dance UK members can now access the British Olympic Association Medical Scheme through Dance UK. For information, please contact Helen Laws on 020 7713 0730. ■



Company: Royal Ballet
Production: *Chroma*
Choreographer: Wayne MacGregor
Dancers: Sarah Lamb and Federico Bonelli
Photographer: Johan Persson