

#instaballet

Create Together

February 17, 2025

Dear Chair Nguyen and members of the committee,

My name is Miranda Atkinson, and it is my honor to testify on behalf of #instaballet, a small grassroots nonprofit founded in 2013 in Eugene, Oregon.

#instaballet is an interactive dance company that presents dance differently. Instead of performing completed works on a stage, we engage audiences in the real time creation of original choreography. Professional dancers are brought together with community audiences, translating audience ideas into movement. At an #instaballet, the audience is the choreographer.

#instaballet's mission is to teach the use of creativity to empower the self and build community through the art of dance. Through our one-of-a-kind model that (1) engages the audience in dialogue around a theme (2) gathers ideas for movement (3) guides the creation of new dance works, we don't only invite audiences to watch dance—we include them in the creation of it.

We do this through our free community workshop series held in public spaces throughout Eugene and Springfield, and we do it through our on-site, accessible education programs in the public schools and at other nonprofits, prioritizing working with youth with Autism, youth with disabilities, and other youth who most often lack access to dance but benefit greatly from a chance at creative expression.

In 2024, #instaballet was delighted to receive an Arts Build Communities grant from the Oregon Arts Commission. The grant funded the addition of live music into all of our programs, something we had dabbled with before, but wanted to intentionally integrate into our educational workshops in particular.

At every event where musicians created and composed alongside the dancers, the depth of impact was clearly greater. It added a new element for audience members to connect with, bringing more people farther into the collaborative, creative process.

In fact, it was so successful, requested by community members, educators, and children alike, that we pursued the endeavor beyond the grant parameters, as we were able to leverage the initial investment from the Oregon Arts Commission to expand programs with live music. That led to our first collaboration with Chamber Music Amici in December, which included two performances at the Wildish Theatre in Springfield, and two educational programs, one where we brought Chamber Music Amici to our longest standing partner—Bridgeway House, a school that supports children with Autism.

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The impact was tremendous—the students loved the combination of live music and dance. Teachers present were moved to tears by the level of engagement the students showed. Students at Bridgeway House often hesitate to participate, but that’s not the case with #instaballet, even more so, when Chamber Music Amici joined us.

One student was up and dancing while talking with Thomas the violinist, completely taken with the music he played, saying “Play it Thomas!” while she twirled with the dancers on stage. For children with Autism, whose social engagement often looks different, it could not have been more clear that through music AND dance, she experienced meaningful connections with the artists there—many of whom were strangers—because she was free to be herself. And that’s what art does. It sets us free to express who we are—opening us up to the possibility of authentic connections with others.

There is a lot of great impact data from our efforts to track our reach and understand our impact. Last year we reached over 3,000 community members, served 600 youth, paid \$41,000 to the local creative workforce, and partnered with 18 other organizations. We know what we do matters because research demonstrates that experiencing dance is linked to improved individual cognitive and social development while simultaneously increasing empathy and the ability to interpret the emotions of others. And while that data is great, there are so many moments—moments where you can see a child’s confidence grow, where you can see trust develop—that capture the impact more clearly than any data point ever could.

To me, this is why it's so clear that the arts are not superfluous. They are not “nice to have.” They are not the “icing on the cake.” They are the very foundation of who we are as people and what brings us together.

But we need reliable funding to meet the needs of our community. Our programs have tripled over the past three years, with funding limiting capacity. And despite our success with the Arts Build Communities grant and continued need, we were unsuccessful in our application this year. The explanation provided was that there is simply not enough funding to meet the need in our state. Funding from the Oregon Arts Commission is critical for us to be able to return to our existing partner; to say “yes” when children ask us to promise we will return soon. And funding is also essential for the new partnership requests we receive—there is so much more community to build with art.

We are just one, small arts organization. There are so many more doing important work that need access to consistent and reliable funding. With these bills, you have a chance to make that happen.

Thank you for listening.

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Sincerely,



Miranda Atkinson
Executive Director | #instaballet