

## Dance Schools in Newfoundland

Kristin Harris Walsh

In recent years, the number of dance schools in Newfoundland, particularly in urban areas such as St. John's, has skyrocketed. These schools increasingly offer classes in styles as varied as Bollywood and bellydance, salsa and step dance, as well as more common ballet, tap and jazz. Dance schools have ventured beyond merely providing classes to little girls in tutus (although that demographic certainly comprises the majority of dance school students), attracting boys as well as girls, and adults of both genders to learn and perform dance in an astonishing variety of styles. Today, Newfoundland is a veritable hotbed of dance and is home to innumerable private dance schools; Kittiwake Dance Theatre, a semi-professional modern dance and ballet company; Summerdance, an annual outdoor dance festival; DanceNL, a new provincial dance association; and Neighbourhood Dance Works, a dance collective of local contemporary dance artists. There are currently an estimated 4,000-5,000 individuals<sup>1</sup> taking classes in dance schools in St. John's alone. Dance schools are open in Paradise, CBS, Mount Pearl, Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, Corner Brook, Labrador City and Carbonear.

My book will begin with a history of dance schools in the province from the time of the Galway Sisters to the present day. I will examine how the formal instruction of dance reflects the changing culture of Newfoundland and Labrador, including urban/rural differences, influences from both vernacular dance revivals and popular culture products such as "Riverdance" and "Dancing with the Stars," as well as the effects from increased immigration of a wide variety of ethnocultural groups in the province. I would like to interview as many dance teachers as possible to reflect the importance of dance schools in the culture of the province.

The dance world in Newfoundland has not been well-documented to date. While vernacular dance forms have seen some research and study, more formalized dance training has largely been ignored in both academic and popular writing about Newfoundland. It is my goal to give those involved in dance schools in the province a voice alongside the more familiar voices of vernacular dancers. Dance is an important part of Newfoundland's cultural history and is increasingly becoming recognized as such. It is clear that art and culture is of importance to Newfoundland and to Newfoundlanders, and this project will play an important role in the preservation, analysis and promotion of dance in Newfoundland.

Kristin Harris Walsh is a dance scholar (MA in Dance from York University in 1997, PhD in Folklore in 2009 with a dissertation on vernacular dance in NL), dancer (ballet trained in Toronto from 1977 to 1997, Irish-Newfoundland step dance training in 2000, Irish step dance training in St. John's from 2001-present, and in Ireland in 2006) and dance writer (I have published in *Dance Current* as well as in academic journals on dance topics). I am currently the President of DanceNL, the new provincial sectoral dance association.

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<sup>1</sup> This number comes from anecdotal evidence given to me by administration at the Arts and Culture Centre in St. John's, based on figures of dance school performances.