

History of Ontario Secondary School DANCEFEST

2020 – 2022 – The Virtual Years

In March 2020, the world shut down. A global pandemic, COVID-19, would force the cancellation of OSSDF2020 that was planning to return to the Scotiabank Convention Centre in Niagara Falls. A small virtual event was offered with 7 “live” dance workshops. This platform would continue to grow over the next 3 years and offer OSSDF2021 and OSSDF2022 as virtual events as well and expand the virtual “live” workshops to 31.

The introduction in 2020 of **OSSDF Teachers’ Council meetings** allowed Ontario dance educators to meet and share information and resources; participate in “live” teacher workshops; and, gain opportunities to discuss the changes/reactions in education occurring during the pandemic.

OSSDF2020 was planning to return to the Scotiabank Convention Centre in Niagara Falls from May 7th – 9th, 2020, to provide a more central location in the province for schools travelling longer distances. An exciting lineup of adjudicators and workshop leaders was organized; however, a global pandemic, COVID-19, would cancel the live event. All participant and dance entry fees were refunded, and school registrations were extended to the following year. A small virtual event was offered in replacement of the live event with 7 online “live” workshops provided for students via HG Instagram.

In the fall of 2020, our dynamic volunteer board members realigned the OSSDF mandate to enhance support for overwhelmed dance educators across Ontario. OSSDF changed the focus from organizing one annual spring event to a virtual online event and offering biweekly educational resources for teachers to share with students in classes, and/or blended and online learning. Laura Barnes joined the board to offer her technology expertise to “package” 20 pre-recorded dance artist workshops with artistry, education and inspiration that OSSDF shared with over **80** educators from schools across **29** Ontario school boards. Some educators requested multiple workshops to share with **5,418** students that enjoyed instruction in Ballet (2), Jazz (2), Hip Hop (2), Tap, Contemporary (2), Musical Theatre (2), Jazz Funk (2), Lyrical, Heels, Bollywood, Stretch and Strength, Classical Latin, Ballroom and Yoga. In addition, some of the workshops included extensive lesson plans written by Laurel Brown and other respected dance educators. Furthermore, two “Live” teacher workshops were offered on the Creative Process with Deb Kapp of *Action Pak* and Annemarie Cabri of *Brain & Body Boost*. A lecture, *Breathing With A Mask*, was also given by Fariya Doctor, B.Sc., RMT and GCFP Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teacher™. It was a great feeling to stay connected with our dance community and support these very generous and talented dance artists who were tremendously impacted by the pandemic. They were our heroes!

OSSDF continues to strive to ensure that dance stays present and vital in education and that we “bridge the gap” between elementary, secondary, post-secondary education and the larger dance community. The introduction in 2020 of **OSSDF Teachers’ Council meetings** have allowed Ontario educators to meet and share information and resources; participate in “live” workshops; and, gain opportunities to discuss the changes/reactions in education. Melanie Randall, OSSDF VP led the meetings over ZOOM during the 2020/2021/2022 school years.

DANCEFEST2021 was shared virtually on our new website, ossdancefest.ca created by Communication and Event Coordinator, Laura Barnes, who issued vimeo links with a password to protect the likenesses of our students who watched the dance entries in their classes or online from home. This new virtual format provided an opportunity for OSSDF to impact a wider audience who celebrated the original choreography and dance performance. Province wide participation from areas that would not normally have the finances or opportunity to attend our annual event was now attainable through our groundbreaking event delivery and virtual educational resources, professional development and networking. Thus, we amended our **OSSDF Mission Statement** *“to provide inclusive, encouraging, and empowering opportunities for dance learners, educators, and artists to explore and collaborate within the artform of dance as learners move through elementary to postsecondary, and beyond.”* Michael Bilardo and David Minen, Co-founders of Infinidiv Corporation, were the website managers from 2018-2020 until Laura joined the OSSDF Board.

Dance is a lifelong activity that offers great benefits to participants’ physical and mental health. In 2021, OSSDF created the quote, *“Dance, always a form of expression, is even more essential in challenging times.”* As we continued to move through the 2+ years of a global pandemic, we modified the quote in 2022 to state, *“Dance is an expression of creativity that we can celebrate lifelong while achieving great benefits to our physical and mental health.”* And, OSSDF added an 11 additional pre-recorded eduDANCEon! dance artist workshops/educational resources to distribute to Ontario educators to share with their students.

OSSDANCEFEST2022 was released virtually in June featuring **265** enthusiastic dance students from 11 Ontario secondary schools who came together to celebrate their original choreography and dance performances. **85** dance entries of various dance styles were shared via our website, ossdancefest.ca in a 5 hour virtual event for students, teachers, parents and administrators - an increase of 145% over our OSSDF2021 virtual event that hosted 85 dancers performing 38 dance entries. Our empowering adjudicators, **Sarah Vance, Cathy Harris** and **Edward Duranyi**, recognized schools and participants for their outstanding artistry and performance efforts with **Special Awards** and **Awards of Excellence for Outstanding Performances** (technical achievement), **Outstanding Choreography** (artistic achievement) and **OVERALL AWARDS of Excellence for DANCE ARTISTRY** (based on cumulative of technical & artistry achievement). **Holy Names High School**, from Windsor, was awarded the **Most Inspiring OSSDF2022 School**. BRAVO to all

our dancers who received impressive DANCEFEST swag prior to the event and creative digital awards following the event.