

Walker Art Center

A Recipe Book For Engaging Dance Audiences



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Introduction

Over the past 18 months, the Walker had the opportunity to create, test, analyze, and revise a number of engagement opportunities. This “recipe book” outlines our findings and learnings from each of these engagement strategies. We hope these tips and techniques will help presenters and dance companies to create their own, individualized methods of engaging audiences before and after events.

Walker Dance Program

Presenting 20–30 dance events each year, the Walker’s contemporary dance program has nurtured long-standing relationships with innovators such as Trisha Brown, Merce Cunningham, and Bill T. Jones, as well as many emerging and mid-career artists, through commissions, residencies, and presentations. In 2005 the Walker opened its intimate 385-seat McGuire Theater which features the stage and fly space, acoustics, sound system, and technological

capacity found in venues twice its size. Recently presented dance artists include Saburo Teshigawara, Big Dance Theater, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, and Reggie Wilson among many others.

The program serves as a catalytic force in the dance life of the Twin Cities, bringing leading innovators in dance and dance-theater from around the world to the Midwest and offering important commissions, developmental and presentational opportunities for selected leading choreographers in Minnesota. As an international center for contemporary art and ideas, the Walker also leads the way in supporting the burgeoning intersection between dance and other disciplines, including visual art, music, design, and film. Philip Bither serves as the McGuire Senior Curator for Performing Arts. Visit performingarts.walkerart.org/index.wac

Engaging Dance Audiences Project

In October 2009 the Walker was awarded one of nine nationwide

grants as part of the Engaging Dance Audiences project:

“Over the 18-month grant period the Walker will feature 20-25 dance events including extended production and community-based residencies, commission premieres, site-specific and interdisciplinary works, and performances featuring emerging, local, global, legendary, and mid-career artists. Many involve 1-7 week residencies, some with local participation that will allow the transformative presence of dance creators to more deeply engage local communities. We will connect all programs through common audience engagement threads, but will select 8-10 key projects that will serve as our main focus to develop scalable, replicable models to engage audiences before, during, and after performances.”

While this project focused on audience engagement including interpretive, learning, and relational efforts to build stronger ties to existing dance audiences, the Walker also saw the opportunity to use some of these same tools to develop and expand new

audiences. These were not audiences necessarily new to dance. In fact, part of the Walker’s strategy was to use resources such as the Walker blogs to reach dance audiences from other local non-contemporary dance venues and ensembles. Furthermore, as a multidisciplinary art center, the Walker has large audiences that attend other performing, media, and visual arts programs. Efforts were made to develop these non-dance art-goers into dance attendees. Through social media, targeted traditional marketing, and inventive personal outreach using gallery tour guides as part of the new SpeakEasy post-performance conversations, the Walker strove to find ways to bridge a perceived artistic discipline “gap” and move more audiences from the galleries into the theater.

Measuring Success

Over the course of the grant, the Walker gathered data specific to this project as well as additional surveys related to an overarching Walker-wide audience research project. Both studies revealed

the positive impact the EDA project had on dance audiences. The EDA-specific surveys conducted by WolfBrown (located at eda.groupsites.com inside the Walker file cabinet) revealed several interesting findings. Walker dance audiences' awareness and use of the newly developed engagement tools—outlined in this booklet—did increase over time, based on our general audience research surveys. It is believed that audience receptivity is a testament to increased visibility and familiarity with these EDA-funded resources, events, activities, and programs.

The Walker's larger institution-wide survey revealed other interesting findings related to dance audiences and their high use of online resources. **Compared to most other Walker programs and the average Walker visitor, dance audiences were the most familiar with available online tools.** Only 1% were not aware of the Walker's website. And a full 75% were either regular users or at least aware of the Walker blogs. Even more striking was our dance audience's use of social media. A full 72% were aware of

or used the Walker's Facebook page and 52% were aware of or followed the Walker on Twitter.

The key takeaway from these surveys is that the continued creation and dispersal of content is critical to engaging dance audiences. We know that not every tool is appropriate for every performance and organizational capacities can limit what is produced, but audiences are hungry for ways to engage more deeply pre- and post-performance. The following strategies are a point of departure for ongoing programs at the Walker—some will be redesigned—and in the spirit of recipes, this book encourages the use of substitutions and additions as tastes change.

We'd love to hear about any modifications you make to these recipes, different ingredients used, and what your results were. Share your experiences on the EDA Groupsites discussion forum for "Tips and Tricks for Audience Engagement": eda.groupsites.com/discussion/forum/show/221842.

Post-Show Receptions

- **What It Is**

Every Thursday night after our dance performances, the choreographer, cast, and crew join the audience in our informal Balcony Bar (literally a makeshift bar set up in our theater's upper balcony), to celebrate opening night together.

- **Why It's Worthwhile**

Our Thursday night receptions provide audiences intimate, one-on-one access to artists. These receptions differ from our post-show Q&As, where the audience does not typically mingle with the artists, or our Saturday night SpeakEasys, where the audience discusses a piece and its meaning(s) separate from the influence of the artists. Unlike A Think & A Drink, this is not an exclusive gathering for members only. Thursdays are generally the premiere of a three-night run in our theater and we encourage the local art community to come by providing cheaper tickets that night.

- **What's Involved**

Artists are allowed to stay in the Balcony Bar for as little or as long as they wish. We provide the cast and crew with a drink ticket.

- **What Didn't Work**

Occasionally, an artist prefers not to spend this time with the audience, so you need to check with them ahead of time. It also needs to be clearly communicated to audiences that the cast and crew reception is a perk, not a guarantee. Curators make themselves available to talk during the post-show reception regardless of the artist's participation.

- **Anecdotes**

Many times after the reception, local dancers are more interested in taking a master class with the touring choreographer.

- **Creating Your Own**

Hosting receptions in an informal environment (with drinks) helps everyone to be comfortable.

Post-Show Q&As

• What's Involved

Every Friday night after a dance performance at the Walker, the artists return to the stage after their curtain call for a question and answer session with either a member of the Walker's performing arts program staff or a guest interviewer from the local arts community. This moderator from the local arts community is often a dancer, curator, or writer. The Q&A session starts with a few questions from the moderator then opens up to include questions from the audience.

• Why It's Worthwhile

Whether to ask a question of the artist directly or to hear the responses in this setting, many audience members choose to attend Friday night performances because of this opportunity. In contrast to our SpeakEasy program, which provides a way for audience members to develop their own voice and opinions about a dance work, Q&As provide a forum to hear the authoritative voice of the

artist. Q&As are one of multiple choices for audience members to choose the engagement tool that works best for them.

• What Works

Making an announcement about the Q&A after curtain call lets everyone know that those who wish to participate may move closer to the stage. Giving some time frame ("Artists will be back in five minutes") ensures that those leaving will not disrupt the dialogue.

• What Didn't Work

Facilitation is an under-appreciated skill, as grace and care are necessary with both artists and audience members (who are often nervous). It is important that the moderator consider all the participants when asking their carefully considered questions; if you invite the entire cast on stage (or often, it is the artist who wants the company there), be sure to give them a chance to talk and contribute to the conversation. It can feel awkward otherwise. If the audience's questions constantly refer to one artist's contribution over another's, the moderator can jump in to ask

more questions of the others in order to keep the Q&A balanced.

- **Anecdotes**

Q&As shouldn't be too long or too short. The quality of the conversation is a good guide as this can vary from one Q&A period to another. If questions start to lose focus, that's an indication that all the "good" questions have been asked. Less is usually more, so don't let it drag on. It is fine to conclude with some hands still in the air.

- **Statistics**

Typically, 50-60% of the audience remains for a post-show Q&A.

- **Creating Your Own**

Post-show Q&As are a tried and true mainstay and have a built-in audience that loves these opportunities to react to the work they have just experienced. Depending on your venue, you can play around with moving the conversation offstage to a more social environment to keep it fresh.

Also, you can invite the audience down to the stage to meet

the artists (if they are ok with it) at the conclusion, which builds an even closer social bond to the event and to dance.

Remember that it takes time for a moderator to research and gather questions for a successful talk.

SpeakEasy

- **What It Is**

SpeakEasys are informal gatherings after our Saturday-night dance performances where audience members can discuss a performance together in a non-intimidating bar setting.

- **What We Did**

Immediately after certain dance performances, we host a discussion about that show for audience members who wish to participate. The conversation is facilitated by a local choreographer and a Walker visual arts tour guide who draw on their respective trainings in dance and visual arts.

- **Why It's Worthwhile**

SpeakEasys provide a way for audience members to ask questions and interpret a performance together. The SpeakEasy format is able to accompany audience members at any level of experience, from dance aficionados to complete newbies. Audience members leave the SpeakEasy

with a better understanding of a dance work and the ways it can be interpreted. Audience members gain increased dance literacy, validation, and confidence when expressing their impressions watching dance. Even the shy can eavesdrop easily and gain critical experience regarding the ways people talk about dance. The SpeakEasy emphasizes the sharing of ideas with fellow audience members rather than being lectured to by an "expert." Unlike a post-show Q&A, the artist is intentionally excluded from the intimate conversation, so that audience members feel comfortable asking "simple" questions or even being critical without seeming rude.

- **What's Involved**

The facilitators receive a how-to about the SpeakEasy, program notes one week prior, and two complimentary tickets to the show (and a drink ticket). The local choreographer isn't expected to be familiar with the programmed artist or style of dance. We always hold SpeakEasys in our Balcony

Bar, where audience members can get a drink and converse after a show. We have chairs pre-arranged in a circle before the show. We promote the SpeakEasy in our program notes and blogs online, but most attend because of our onstage announcement immediately after the show when we name the facilitators and point to the meeting space.

• **What Works**

SpeakEasys have been well-attended almost always, with the Balcony Bar often full. We created guidelines for facilitating the discussion (for these guidelines and to see photos of a SpeakEasy, visit eda.groupsite.com/file_cabinet) so that the choreographer and tour guide are able to prevent the discussion from becoming stuck or dominated by any one voice or opinion.

• **What Didn't Work**

After one performance we didn't have an onstage announcement about the SpeakEasy, and no one showed up.

• **Anecdotes**

Dozens of participants have expressed their pleasure with this program. One local choreographer sent us an email in which she called it "perfect" and said "It's exactly what you want to do after seeing a show—sit and chat (with drinks) with a group of people who have just watched the same show." The education and community programs department at the Walker has decided to test the SpeakEasy model as an institution-wide program across disciplines.

• **Statistics**

Since the program's inception, we've averaged about 23 participants per SpeakEasy, usually more. It is common for people to have different levels of commitment and to float in and out of the conversation.

• **Creating Your Own**

To recreate a SpeakEasy-type program outside of a multidisciplinary art center, individuals from local galleries or art spaces could replace the role our tour guides play in the discussions.

Talk Dance Podcasts

- **What It Is**

Talk Dance podcasts are audio interviews between a selected artist (or our curator) and the Talk Dance host, a local choreographer. These podcasts are streamed online and downloadable to mobile devices.

The Walker's performing arts department hired Minneapolis-based choreographer Justin Jones to interview every guest choreographer who presented work at the Walker during the EDA grant period. For the few instances when a choreographer was not available for an interview, Jones interviewed the Performing Arts Senior Curator Philip Bither about that choreographer and the specific work to be presented at the Walker. These podcasts were archived and viewable from the Walker Channel (the Walker's webcasting platform that features a wide range of public programs, including lectures, readings, and presentations involving artists, scholars, and critics of

contemporary art), YouTube, and iTunes U and can be accessed by the public in perpetuity.

- **Why It's Worthwhile**

Talk Dance podcasts explain what an audience member can expect of an artist's work. The podcasts provide contextual and behind-the-scenes information that allows dance audiences to hear directly from the choreographers about their work, before or after they see a show.

- **What's Involved**

We hired Justin Jones to schedule, host, record, and edit a final digital version of each interview. He received a small honorarium for each podcast plus two complimentary tickets to the show. He prepared for each interview by watching a DVD of the upcoming show when available and doing research online. The Talk Dance podcasts are also broken up by time cues into shorter, more digestible segments and indexed by topic.

• **What Works**

The Walker was able to build on Jones' connection to the local dance community, his original podcast series—which featured interviews with local choreographers rather than the national/international scope of work presented by the Walker—and his national reputation.

Although Talk Dance podcasts are typically 45 minutes, the average viewer is able to choose an aspect of the choreographer's work without requiring any major time investment, since the discussion is broken up by time cues. We initially posted shorter, themed clips, but the amount of content became unwieldy and a little messy. We now have only the longer format interview posted, but it is accompanied by a key of time cues for when exactly people should click forward to hear a certain topic discussed. Like many of our engagement strategies, Talk Dance allowed access for non-dance audiences as well as providing opportunities for experienced dancers to dig deeper.

Talk Dance podcasts contrib-

uted to SpeakEasy discussions, with some participants referencing information from a Talk Dance podcast at a SpeakEasy.

• **What Didn't Work**

Our podcasts were often recorded over the phone, and the technology to make those recordings sometimes failed (one recording was lost as a result). Sound quality was not always the greatest. Talk Dance is a newer program, so those polled have noted low awareness of this program. Overloaded staff and host schedules caused these podcasts to often be uploaded after the choreographer had presented their work at the Walker. We organized the interviews to occur two weeks ahead of time; in many cases, more time would have been helpful.

• **Anecdotes**

Justin Jones announced each podcast on his Facebook page and several other local choreographers followed his talks as a result. He immediately posted them as soon as they were ready and as a

result his friends noticed a technical glitch that cut off the last 30 seconds of each interview. With this feedback, we were able to quickly address and fix an error we may not have noticed until much later.

that these podcasts also require extra staff time (or hired freelance time) for the final review and edit.

Visit channel.walkerart.org/series/talk-dance/

• **Statistics**

We have 10 Talk Dance editions so far that collectively have received more than 2100 total page views to date. The individual podcasts have received, on average, 126 views each.

• **Creating Your Own**

The Talk Dance podcast is replicable for other arts organizations. Remember that a quiet, uninterrupted space is needed for the interview. We value this program because of how it links our local dance scene with the broader world of national and international contemporary dance. It provides a different point of view from our institutional voice and helps orient the audience.

Besides modest investment in the equipment necessary to provide high-quality materials, keep in mind

Video Interviews

- **What It Is**

Video interviews with artists are archived on the Walker Channel (visit channel.walkerart.org/browse/genre/dance/) and are available to stream or download. Our videotaped interviews usually take the form of curatorial conversations between visiting artists and the Walker's programming staff, without a live audience.

- **Why It's Worthwhile**

The in-depth perspective of curatorial conversations allows audiences to learn about the creative process and insider experience of a piece. These interviews provide a way for audiences to hear from the dance artists directly when they often wouldn't have a chance to see or hear them speak about their work otherwise. Audiences can deepen their understanding of a particular artist or the context around a specific work, before or after attending a performance by that artist. They are an asset to the artist and the field and will con-

tinue to be an important part of Walker archives in perpetuity.

- **What's Involved**

The videos, once they are completed, are archived for streaming on the Walker Channel, YouTube, and for download on iTunesU. The artist may be nervous if it is their first recorded video interview, but the knowledge that the interviews are a great resource for future marketing efforts may put them at ease. Other presenters or managers/agents will also be able to reference these videos. There's a lot of room for artists to edit the final product, which takes time.

- **Technical Aspects**

Two cameras have been used to film interviews between choreographers and Walker curatorial staff, and included a single wide shot and also a close-up on the choreographer. It's important to remember that two-camera-shoots require editing whereas one-camera-shoots may not. Staff capacity issues need to be considered; the Walker had to hire a freelancer to complete our video

editing goals in a timely fashion.

• **What Works**

These videos have the potential to become viral sensations. A similar-type video interview the Walker created with jazz musician Bill Frisell has so far received 13,000 views on YouTube (and it has been linked to on dozens of other sites). While not dance-related, we are hoping for similar out-of-the-park responses with our dance videos.

It's best to schedule conversations after opening night when the artist is more relaxed and the curator has had a fresh experience with the work.

• **What Didn't Work**

Due to the lengthy back and forth between editing and approval, it has been impossible to get these videos online in time to capitalize on touring venues' press and media visibility. This is because the artist needs to be in town in order to film.

• **Anecdotes**

In general, older artists are looking forward to this service and the coverage it provides. Younger artists may need assurance that it's worthwhile to have such an intimate conversation out in the public.

The "delivery" of videos streamed online has become easier due to technical advances. Our videos are posted to YouTube and then embedded onto the Walker Channel.

• **Statistics**

This is a revived program for us with EDA, and we have created 4 new videos since EDA began, each video averaging 319 views so far.

• **Creating Your Own**

Anyone can create a YouTube account with a themed channel. Start your own library of videos today and link to your website and press releases.

Dance Trailers

- **What It Is**

Dance trailers mix excerpts from our video interviews with performance footage to create short, promotional videos about a specific work.

- **Why It's Worthwhile**

Dance trailers serve a different audience and purpose than our video interviews. The trailers are promotional and entertaining while the longer format video interviews provide more information and can be used for scholarly research.

- **What's Involved**

Like our video interviews, the dance trailers are archived onto the Walker Channel, YouTube, and iTunesU. The existing interview and performance documentation needs to be reviewed and edited in cooperation with our videography staff or freelance editors. The segments with the most impact are chosen and the artist needs to

approve the final product.

For our videography work, we also had to purchase compatible documentation equipment that would match our existing equipment to allow for smoother editing of the 2 camera shoots and better sound quality.

- **Technical Aspects**

To film the performance footage included in the trailers, two cameras have helped with production capabilities like close-ups of dancing. The content of the show affects the number of cameras needed: a show with large-scale movement may only need one camera whereas a show with a lot of smaller, individual movements would require more cameras.

Our switch to High Definition cameras added more color info and detail. This subtlety is not available in standard definition; because of this, HD is not just an aesthetic choice but has the potential to better communicate what a show is about. Additionally, taping a stage with HD's wide-screen format composes dance in a cinematic way better suited for distribution. A good-quality tri-

pod is a wise investment for filming dance. Lastly, our HD cameras have remote zoom which is very helpful for the shoots.

- **What Works**

These short videos reach a high viewership and are popular. They are also easily digestible in their short duration and can be easily linked to by other arts presenters.

- **What Didn't Work**

As with the video interviews, it has been impossible to get these online in time to capitalize on touring venues' press and media visibility. Also because of limited staff resources we needed to hire outside freelance staff for the final edits. It is important to remember that these videos trailers take time and may be expensive to produce. Make sure you have the resources available to pay for good equipment and staff or freelance costs – both are necessary for successful completion of these online initiatives.

- **Anecdotes**

A lot of choreographers have the rights to use copyrighted music in their shows, but those music rights are not secured for video. Additionally, dancers may not be comfortable with video footage of their performance being broadcast (for example, if they were nude). All these rights issues need to be cleared.

- **Statistics**

Dance trailers are new for us since EDA began. We have created 5 trailers since the grant period began, each trailer averaging 383 views so far. These numbers show that dance trailers receive the most views, on average, of any of our online engagement strategies.

Walker Dance Commissions Online Archive

• What It Is

Basic information about dance commissions throughout our presenting history are archived online on the Walker website (performingarts.walkerart.org/list.wac?title=Commissions).

• What's Involved

Rudimentary “tombstone” information, with a photo and links to blogs and/or a commission’s online calendar page, currently makes up each entry. Our commissions archive is currently in the process of transfer to a new format with the redesign of the Walker website. This redesign will show our comprehensive history with returning artists. Over 200 commissions are listed on the Walker’s online archive.

• What Works

By archiving our historic dance

and performing arts commissions online we are able to serve art historians, the broader public, and the performing artists themselves. Our archive is not only a history of our performing arts events, but also a history of the rich online content we have created surrounding each of these events, as each entry often features links to videos, articles, and blogs.

• What Didn't Work

The commissions information is easily buried within the calendar content and upcoming events featured on our current website. The redesign of the Walker website (due to roll out Fall 2012) will level these hierarchical issues with an interface that better balances past, present, and future events at the Walker.

• Anecdotes

The Walker, as a museum-based institution, values the collection, preservation, and interpretation of art as much as the creation and presentation of art. The performing arts commissions archive serves to highlight what would

be considered a "permanent collection" in a visual arts program. In this way, we more fully support the work of a commissioned artist by drawing on their history with our organization.

W. Mellon Foundation and will be freely available (more information available at collectionspace.org).

• **Creating Your Own**

It is an ongoing process to maintain these pages and add the information for new commissions. Keep in mind the staff capacity necessary to keep up such a database. While scale will vary by institution, the Walker has had as many as three interns working on this database at one time.

The Walker is an early adopter of CollectionSpace, an open source collections information management application. We are researching and defining the performing arts requirements as part of an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant and implementing CollectionSpace for the management of our permanent collection, archives, film/video study collection, and performing arts commissions. CollectionSpace is a project of the Museum of the Moving Image with support of The Andrew

Talking Dance Lectures

• What It Is

The Walker's Talking Dance lectures are facilitated conversations, open to the public, where choreographers/dance artists speak about their work, in dialogue with a scholar or informed staff member. The name "Talking Dance" is meant to brand the lecture series and contextualize the lecture around choreographers. The lecture is followed by a Q&A with the audience. Talking Dance lectures differ from post-show Q&As because of their extended length, use of other materials such as audio/video, and thorough attention to a dance artist (often their entire career).

• What's Involved

Once identified, the facilitator researches the topics of conversation. In addition the conversation can be supplemented with video excerpts and images so these materials need to be procured in advance.

• What Works

Scheduling and presenting the lecture in conjunction with a live performance of the artist's works—usually the week of and not the same day as the performance—expands your audience's engagement. We often extend invitations to dance departments in order to build an audience in advance, trying to draw students from colleges or universities if their professors are not already planning to attend. While these are "lectures," they are geared towards audience members at all interest levels. These evening-length programs have nearly always been free.

• What Didn't Work

It is difficult to convince audiences to come out two nights in one week to support the same project, which means attendance has tended to be low.

• Anecdotes

In the past we have hosted a social gathering in conjunction with the lecture to connect the invited artist with the local dance community.

- **Statistics**

Our two Talking Dance lectures since the EDA grant period began averaged 48 persons in attendance. Talking Dance lectures have existed as a program since 2001. Each Talking Dance lecture is videotaped and archived on the Walker Channel, YouTube, and iTunesU for free viewing.

- **Creating Your Own**

These types of facilitated conversations are easily adapted to a panel discussion if there is a broader topic, or can be made more personal to the artist's history, latest creation, or current aspirations. Also, video documentation can help to further the artist's work or become a resource for the field at a later date.

Lectures of this type are a great opportunity to partner with dance departments at colleges, universities or other humanities-based organizations.

Dance Blogs

• What It Is

The Walker's performing arts blog (blogs.walkerart.org/performing-arts/) provides contextual and promotional information about Walker dance shows. The blog serves as an immediate communication platform tool to get the word out about behind-the-scenes aspects of the art or alerts for a call to action (our shows often entail local participation).

• What's Involved

Each blog post ideally presents a thoughtful, sustained viewpoint on a dance show or artist whose work is connected to the Walker's past, present, or future presenting history, yet with content separate from the material covered by marketing efforts. Besides the more constant voice of the performing arts interns and staff, many guest bloggers contribute preview and review articles, or other additional dance-related news and topics. Our blog posts are about 400 words on average. Remember that blog posts may engender a

conversation that will need continued attention and responses from staff. While posts may not remain open to comments forever, it is the responsibility of staff members to keep up with any continued activity on old posts.

• What Works

Blogs find the largest and most responsive readership when they include photos and videos. Hyperlinks help greatly. Linking the post to the related live events creates visibility for your programs. Make sure to have each blogger, guest, or staff complete an online profile/bio which helps put a face to a name. Casual blogs without institutional language showcase individuals with unique perspectives.

Walker blogs are immediately linked to other social media as soon as they are posted. The blogs automatically appear on the Walker's Facebook page and Twitter account, which ensures visibility.

• **What Didn't Work**

Blogs that are text-heavy or devoid of photos and videos lose readers' interest quickly. Not many blog readers add comments (at least for our site), which can be discouraging, but if your topic has any controversy, your blog will be flooded with comments—good and bad—which is exciting to see happen.

• **Anecdotes**

At several SpeakEasys, people brought up information from the Walker blogs as starting points for discussion. Blogs host debate and constructive dialogue about dance, the merits of a particular work, and art in general.

Our most striking example of blog response is from two years ago: the blog for the annual Walker event Choreographers' Evening featured a thread with over 100 comments, with people heatedly discussing what is (and isn't) dance.

• **Statistics**

Since the grant period began, 44 individual blog posts have been

created on the Walker website specifically about dance. This is above and beyond our usual blog activity from years past, and the EDA grant is what enabled us to maintain such a strong focus on blogging. Blogs have more views, on average, than any of our other online engagements strategies besides curatorial video interviews and dance trailers. Each Walker dance blog averages around 200 individual views, but the attention your blog receives will vary.

• **Creating Your Own**

Consider what your online readers might find most useful or interesting. What can you provide that other organizations cannot? With press coverage changing, blogs provide a vehicle for information both tangential and core to your programming. It can sometimes be your only "public" face in the community. Blogs are guideposts for your audience.

A Think & A Drink

• What It Is

A Think & A Drink is a social gathering for a self-selected group of Walker members after gallery hours that involves a guided exhibition tour prior to a dance performance. Most often these events link exhibition themes or artists with the performing artists onstage. A Think & A Drink is an exclusive member event, limited in size, with the chance to view art and then discuss over drinks.

• Why It's Worthwhile

A Think & A Drink provides opportunities to deeply engage with art and affiliate with other members, curators, and artists who present their work at the Walker.

• What's Involved

The Walker's performing arts department offers discounted tickets to the dance show in conjunction with the Think & A Drink event. For example, our last Think & A Drink was before the perfor-

mance of Lucinda Childs' *Dance*. The evening began with a 45-minute guided tour of the visual art exhibition by Sol LeWitt (set designer for *Dance*), followed by the Lucinda Childs performance. Afterwards, everyone mingled with Lucinda Childs, Philip Glass (who created the score for *Dance*), and the company dancers.

• What Works

A Think & A Drink provides context to a dance experience and encourages a predominantly visual arts member base to try out a performance. Those with more experience in gallery spaces are given an opportunity to connect to dance. The events provide unique access to experts such as curators and/or artists, and provide a membership perk. The performing arts version that includes a dance show builds on a successful visual arts program.

• Anecdotes

Here are the logistics for our last Think & A Drink: when participants checked in, they received their tickets to the performance,

a free drink ticket, and a colored dot sticker which divided them into groups of 10 to 15 people for the tour of the Sol LeWitt exhibition (4 groups with staggered starts 5 minutes apart). The Walker's Membership department pays for one round of drinks, and a cash bar is open to the people not viewing the exhibition as well as after the performance. At the performance the entire group of 50 or so were all seated in the balcony so that after the show everyone naturally proceeded to drinks in the Balcony Bar (since they had to pass by the bar before leaving). Although the bar was open to the public, the Think & A Drink group intermingled since they'd had an additional shared experience in advance of the performance and, although this was an unintended positive result, they were still wearing Think & A Drink name tags so they knew who else was a part of "their group."

The director of the Think & A Drink program sent us an email in which she said "I've heard from a number of members about how much they loved A Think & A Drink. I also talked to a few PA-newbies who

were impressed, intrigued and will probably try out another PA event because of this experience."

According to our membership department, "people are always happy to have tours be somewhat exclusive and are glad to be with others that are a little more engaged than the general tour groups that happen on weekends. Attendees are more chatty than the regular tour groups, too."

• **Statistics**

Our Think & A Drink events that connect to performing arts shows have sold out all of their tickets (there are 40–50 ticketed attendees for each Think & A Drink).

• **Creating Your Own**

Create a group of loyal patrons or reward subscribers by offering an exclusive tour of your space or galleries prior to a performance. The tour could include meeting the creator, the curator/programmer, or a dance historian to provide some context around the experience. Make it social! Drinks and snacks help.

Ticket Buyer Emails

• What It Is

Pre- and post-show emails specifically to ticket buyers provided contextual information either immediately after audience members bought tickets to a dance show or after they attended the performance.

• What's Involved

Pre-show emails included links to discounted tickets for other upcoming shows, links to blogs, articles, video footage and audio podcasts. Post-show emails included similar links to reviews, articles, pertinent content on the Walker Channel, information about upcoming shows, discounted ticket offers, surveys, or a link to the Walker blogs with the byline: "Join the conversation." These emails pointed people back to the Walker blog, where they could add their comments.

• What Works

The pre- and post-show emails to ticket buyers nimbly tied together all the ways we attempted to interact with audiences before, during, and after a dance performance and helped our audiences connect the dots to all the initiatives surrounding a single artist's engagement.

• What Didn't Work

Special pre- and post-show emails to ticket buyers were ultimately abandoned as an initiative because they failed to generate enough click-throughs or audience feedback of any kind to be measurably effective. These multi-layered missives were also highly time-intensive to prepare and send. In addition, the emails might have been too much information at once for our patrons: overload.

• Statistics

Since the EDA grant began, we created pre- and post-show emails for 4 of our shows: 42% of the recipients on average opened the email at all, with 18% of the recipients on average clicking through to any part of the email.

Program Notes

- **What It Is**

For every dance show, we have paper programs that give cast and crew information, and often biographies and statements of the artists involved.

- **What Works**

Programs provide crucial information, for example details about the piece, names/roles of company dancers, and the order of movements in a dance piece. Ideally, we hope our programs would further discourse about the artists presented at the Walker, with the contextual information we provide acting as a lasting document that audiences can refer to long after the show.

- **What Doesn't**

Artists and artist management usually have the final say on what goes into our program notes. We have often attempted to include contextual information for our dance programs, such as articles or published inter-

views, only to have them nixed by the artists. Program notes, thus, are not always the helpful documents we want them to be. We continue to lament the lack of a system to share contextual program content between presenters, artists, and artist management and agents. For example, in museum practices, when an exhibition is touring all the curatorial info is shared between museums. We would love to see a similar system in place for performing arts presentations.

Additionally, program notes require tons of paper. For a sold-out dance run that goes from Thursday through Saturday, 900-plus programs are needed, with each requiring 2–5 sheets of 8x11-inch paper.

- **Looking Forward**

We are hoping to “go green” with our programs in the next couple years. We’d like to eschew the paper programs in favor of putting all of the information online. We are open to recommendations and would love to hear what others have chosen to do.

Dance 101

- **What It Is**

We hoped to create a video and/or lecture series that would act as a sort of primer for Walker patrons unfamiliar with dance. Many of the dance artists we present build upon modern and contemporary dance history. We hoped to familiarize patrons within this lexicon so that they would feel more confident attending dance at the Walker and be able to interact with it at a more informed and thoughtful level.

- **What's Involved**

Although we did do one Dance 101 presentation, more staff time would be required to refine or develop the materials/research needed for audiences and groups who want to hear this presentation.

- **Looking Forward**

We are planning to compose several blogs that explain dance through the lenses of various artists whose work will be presented at the Walker in the 11-12 season.

These blogs will link to the commissions database.

We are planning a possible panel around "how to view contemporary art" in 2011-12, and we are focusing on our Walker dance commissions which will highlight our history.

Case Study: Eiko & Koma Residency

• What It Is

As part of their 40-year-anniversary Retrospective Project, Eiko & Koma were artists-in-residence at the Walker from October-December of 2010, which marked a moment of concrete, interdisciplinary partnership between the Walker's performing arts and visual arts departments alongside several other departments. The residency culminated in a month-long performance installation by Eiko & Koma in the Walker galleries, which was seen by nearly 8,000 people. This was one of the broadest and longest artist residencies in Walker history.

• Why It's Worthwhile

The Eiko & Koma residency challenged audience's notions of visual art by presenting live dance performance in the galleries for an extended period of time (six hours a day, six days a week). During Eiko & Koma's residen-

cy, we programmed many ways for audiences to engage before and after their experience in the Walker galleries: Eiko & Koma performed their piece *Raven* twice in one day in the theater as a part of our free programming for families, with each performance followed by a *SpeakEasy*; they led a movement workshop for dancers at all levels of experience, participated in a *Talking Dance Lecture*, and online we posted many blog entries about their residency. A *Talk Dance* podcast, performance excerpt of *Naked*, and comprehensive trailer of their entire career were also archived on the Walker Channel for the public to access. Additionally, several of their dance/performance films were screened in the *Lecture Room* during the residency.

• What's Involved

Besides our online outreach through email blasts and the blogs, we sent out a mailing to our Walker patrons that highlighted all the facets of Eiko & Koma's residency and activities at the Walker. In partnering with the visual arts department, much

of the work focused on the curatorial content created around this residency and gallery performance, with special gallery cards made for their month-long performance. A comprehensive, career-retrospective catalogue was published by the Walker to promote and honor the work of Eiko & Koma and connect them to the larger scholarship and discourse of art history. Guards were trained to educate the public about the specific nature of live performance in the galleries. Eiko & Koma also worked closely with the University of Minnesota in creating an Eiko & Koma-specific curriculum as well as other work with local scholars and schools.

• **What Worked**

Eiko & Koma's month-long performance of *Naked* in the Walker galleries generated a lot of feedback and discussion. Because of the length and intensity of the residency, this entire artistic process was viewed as an unqualified success that bridged disciplines and geographic artistic spaces.

• **What Didn't Work**

We had hoped to make the virtual life of the performance installation more robust with a continuous live feed but technical limitations and budget concerns won out. While this initiative was well-received by staff and audience, we had hoped for more complete institutional buy-in, which was difficult with so many competing, worthy programs at the Walker.

• **Anecdotes**

The month-long performance of *Naked* was experienced by the public in different ways. Some gallery-goers came specifically to see the performance while others simply stumbled across the installation while visiting the galleries. Having a mix of dance and non-dance audiences created an exciting buzz in the galleries. From staying for just a moment or several hours or returning on multiple occasions, each viewer had their own reaction to the powerful, reverent, strange, yet completely human experience. Bewilderment, tears, curiosity and quiet contemplation happened on a daily basis.

Comparison of Engagement Strategies

	<i>Talk Dance Podcasts</i>	<i>SpeakEasy</i>	<i>Video Interviews</i>	<i>A Think & A Drink</i>	<i>Post-Show Receptions</i>	<i>Post-Show Q&As</i>	<i>Talking Dance Lectures</i>	<i>Dance Blogs</i>	<i>Archived Commissions</i>	<i>Ticket Buyer Emails</i>
Before	X		X	X			X	X	X	X
After	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Online	X		X				X	X	X	X
On-Site Participatory		X		X	X	X	X			
Inter-disciplinary		X		X	X		X	X	X	X
Educational/ Interpretative	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X