SAVE THE FLECK

The Fleck Dance Theatre, a unique cultural jewel among Toronto's performing arts venues, is threatened with closure as early as March 2025. "The Fleck" is an invaluable artistic resource for dance artists and their loyal audiences and must be saved; but this cannot happen without your active support and involvement.

Some background: the 450-seat Fleck Dance Theatre at Toronto's Queens Quay Terminal has been a unique haven for contemporary dance since it opened in September 1983. Its construction was part of an agreement whereby the then developers, Olympia and York, agreed to incorporate a custom-designed performance space for dance within the multi-use former warehouse. The Premiere Dance Theatre – its original name – was to be leased from the Queens Quay Terminal owners and operated by Harbourfront Centre.

As the city's internationally renowned prestige venue, The Fleck has played host to dance companies and solo artists from Toronto and other Canadian centres from coast to coast. The Fleck has also been the city's leading showcase of international contemporary dance, welcoming an incredibly diverse cultural range of artists from around the globe, thereby offering local artists and audiences an inspirational window onto the wider world of dance and opportunities for cross-cultural and international collaborations.

In early November, it became known that because of critical financial restraints, Harbourfront Centre intends not to renew its lease of The Fleck, which expires 31 March 2025. According to inside sources, Harbourfront Centre did attempt, unsuccessfully, to renegotiate its lease but the current owners are set to "repurpose" the space as soon as they take possession.

Understandably, these sudden developments have sent shock waves through the dance community, here in Toronto, across the country and overseas where companies aspiring to perform in Canada's largest city have traditionally looked to Harbourfront Centre and The Fleck to make it possible.

What can be done to save The Fleck?

Most immediately, we need to postpone its closure, even if this simply means mothballing The Fleck while long-term plans for its continued use are formulated. This needs to be done soon because Harbourfront Centre will start stripping the space of the amenities and fittings it owns – seats, lights, curtains, etc. – starting in early March.

A concerted appeal to all levels of government must be made to provide emergency funding while a new plan is developed. What that plan might look like is very much open for discussion and will depend primarily on securing stable financial support from both public and private sources. This could be channelled through Harbourfront Centre but, equally, could be placed in the trusteeship and stewardship of a new organization.

All this is occurring against the broader backdrop of an existential, post-pandemic crisis for many of Toronto's performing arts organizations. The fact that Harbourfront Centre cites the under-utilization of The Fleck as justification for closing it, is itself a reflection of the crippling financial challenges of the many dance organizations who would like but cannot afford to perform there.