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Visionary arts leader Tonya Lockyer to say farewell to Velocity

Lockyer, who brought increased national recognition to Seattle Dance, announces her departure as artistic executive director of Velocity.

Lockyer's stewardship of Velocity provides more than \$2,000,000 in support to artists, and grows audiences 398%.

Lockyer tells Velocity's past and present artists, staff and supporters, "We did it together, by balancing sustainability with a commitment to rigor, risk-taking and inclusion."

SEATTLE (June 13, 2018)—Tonya Lockyer and Velocity Dance Center today announced that Lockyer is saying farewell to Velocity after 16 years with the organization and seven as its Artistic Executive Director, effective late-Fall 2018.

"Visionary and ambitious, Tonya has done nothing less than put Velocity—and Seattle—on the world map for new dance. Critically for artists based in the Pacific Northwest, she has also brought the world of new dance to Seattle through state-of-the-art international programs and artists. Tonya's made an indelible contribution."—*Melissa E. Feldman, independent curator, writer, Director of the Neddy Artist Awards, Velocity trustee*

In March, Lockyer notified Velocity's board that she would not be renewing her contract. Lockyer said, "Leadership change is essential for contemporary organizations to remain responsive to the moment. Now is the best time for Velocity to have a new leader to take the organization forward." She will stay until late-Fall 2018 to support a robust executive search and meaningful hand-off, and has curated performance programming to take-place through Spring 2019.

After becoming its institutional leader in 2011, Lockyer led Velocity through a period of unprecedented artistic, financial, and community growth; elevating Seattle dance locally and nationally; providing more than \$2,000,000 in direct and in-kind support to artists; and growing Velocity's audiences by 398%. Lockyer raised Velocity's national profile as an incubator for risk-taking artists; re-defined the role of civic engagement in a dance studio; and steered Velocity to its strongest financial position in its organizational history.

Lockyer began her career in Seattle as an internationally touring artist and educator. She came to Velocity first as an artist, then as a programs and communications manager. After leaving for graduate school at The University of Washington, where she was inspired by the mentorship of Herbert Blau, she returned to become Velocity's executive director when the organization was in the midst of an emergency capitol campaign and crippling debt. Within the first two years of her tenure, Velocity had successfully closed its capitol campaign and was operating in the black.

Operationally, Lockyer also oversaw capitol improvements including Velocity's iconic signage, moving artist studio rentals online to make them more accessible, and publishing the organization's first vision, values, and equity statements.

Under Lockyer's artistic leadership, the organization provided thousands of hours of creative residencies to artists, and commissioned hundreds of new works. Lockyer developed the *Made in Seattle* incubator to work one-on-one with artists to help them realize their artistic and organizational goals, successfully bringing national visibility, funding and touring to many Seattle choreographers.

During the past seven years, this small arts organization opened its doors, dramatically expanding participation by producing community-created programs like Velocity's open-mic performance nights *Sh*t Gold*, and Kate Wallich's uber-popular *Dance Church*. Through Velocity's first humanity series, the *Speakeasy Series*, Lockyer facilitated community-led forums on topics such as race and gender, queerness and the economy, and art in prisons: "She's created a safe space where dancers and non-dancers can get in a room and get real with each other about race, gender, power and politics, and how they intersect with art," wrote an audience member.

Lockyer's creative production of spectacular performances around the city—at St. Mark's Cathedral, the Waterfront, the old Greyhound Station, the Moore Theater, Seattle Art Fair, Bumbershoot—drew large audiences and garnered acclaim. Her guest curation of a survey of the work of American choreographer Tere O'Connor with *On the Boards* was praised in *Art Forum*, "Lucky (Seattle), unlucky the rest of the country," wrote former *New York Times* critic Claudia La Rocco. In 2016, *The Stranger's* Jen Graves' *79 Moments in Art that Helped Us Survive 2016* celebrated, "The fact that Seattle Art Fair included dance. In other words: Tonya Lockyer. (Always Tonya Lockyer.)"

Lockyer's accolades also include being nominated for a Mayor's Arts Award, and named "one of the 13 cultural leaders shaping the arts in the Pacific Northwest" by *The Seattle Times* and KUOW. She was also the inaugural Co-Chair of Seattle's first Arts District.

“I hoped to make Velocity a supportive, creative home that inspired dancers to stay in Seattle,” Lockyer wrote in a letter to past and present Velocity artists, staff and supporters. “Together, we’ve done that and so much more; inspiring dancers to move to Seattle from around the country; developing springboards for local artists to get their work out into the world; and creating powerful entry-points for those new to dance. And we did this while balancing sustainability with a commitment to rigor, risk-taking, and inclusion.”

She also expressed deep confidence in the Velocity team’s ability to continue to provide robust resources to artists, adding, “I’m also excited to see what a fresh brain will bring to Velocity to ensure its critical work continues.”

“The whole Board thanks Tonya for her catalytic leadership,” said Velocity board president Owen David. “Today, Velocity is recognized throughout the field for its exceptional programming. This is Tonya’s legacy; her inspiring vision and energy elevated Seattle’s dance community to the national stage, and our collective arts ecology is so much richer for it. We celebrate Tonya’s time at the helm of Velocity. We also remember that she is an artist first, and have the deepest gratitude and respect for the leonine heart that she always brought to holding space for those with something to say. Her advocacy and mentorship will ripple for years to come. The Board intends to conduct an inclusive search with rigor and integrity. Velocity is poised for an exciting stage of growth thanks to Tonya’s work, and we hope to align an incoming executive’s onboarding with the end of 2018. This gift of time should allow for a holistic search process that integrates voices from across our community. Velocity has become a hugely impactful organization and we must be thoughtful.”

Read the statement from Tonya Lockyer on our Webpage

velocitydancecenter.org/news-from-tonya/



ABOUT VELOCITY

Velocity is Seattle’s forward-thinking laboratory and essential incubator for artists, new dance works, critical conversations, community, and teachers. A national nexus for dance, Velocity is recognized as a leader in a new dance development in the US and is instrumental in making Seattle a destination city with one of the most active dance communities in the nation. With artist-led classes and workshops daily, performances weekly; two annual festivals, the Seattle Festival of Dance Improvisation and Strictly Seattle; year-round subsidized studio and theater rentals; and ongoing humanities programs that activate thoughtful conversations; Velocity is a portal for those new to dance and an important community resources. Velocity is Seattle’s only dedicated contemporary dance venue where groundbreaking work and disciplined practice coexist.

Home to hundreds of independent dance artists and renowned for producing innovative, cutting-edge work, Velocity’s artist development programs have fostered the early work and careers of Cherdonna, Zoe Scofield, Dani Tirrell, Kate Wallich, Danielle Agami, Alice Gosti, Kim Lusk, Coleman Pester and 100s more; and was the first to bring to Seattle the work of art stars Tere O’Connor, Miguel Gutierrez, Anouk van Dijk, Bebe Miller, Deborah Hay, Ralph Lemon, Faye Driscoll, Monica Bill Barnes and many more.

Velocity also supports YC2 in partnership with Studio Kate Wallich, a platform for young dance professionals entering the working field to exercise artistic agency while receiving consistent contracted training, rehearsal and performance opportunities.

Velocity advances contemporary dance and movement-based art by fostering the creative explorations of artists and audiences through an invested commitment to education, creation, performance, inquiry, community participation, and inter/national exchange.



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