

# DANCE MAJOR JOURNAL

Dance Writing by Dance Majors

Spring 2011



FROM: the Dance Department, University of California, Irvine

THIS ISSUE: Dance Majors Abroad and at Home  
Including—

*A White Bboy in Ghana*

*Improvising in Spain*

*Tapping in Africa*

*All About Gaga*

*Nudity in Dance*

*Body image, dance stereotypes, studio villains...and more...*

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This issue of *DMJ* is dedicated to Karen Ricketts, the UCI Dance Department’s guardian angel of all things administrative, as well as a stalwart audience member and nurturer of dance majors. She retired in February of 2011. Her daily steps may lead to a different location now, but she’s sure to be choreographing her own life just as gracefully as she did while helping the dance department run for 28 years.

ON THE COVER FROM LEFT: Darina Littleton (2011), Shannon Leypoldt (2010), and Katie Montoya (2011), dancing for the camera during UCI’s summer visit to the University of Ghana, Legon.

SUBMISSIONS: If you are a dance major, please send essay submissions for possible inclusion in the next issue to: Prof. Jennifer Fisher, Dance Department, 300 Mesa Arts Bldg., University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92617.

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## A White Bboy in Africa

by Joe Knox, M.F.A., guest contributor

As a bboy with light skin tone traveling to Africa, I had no idea what to expect. I was headed for Ghana in West Africa as part of a UC I dance-led interdisciplinary trip called “Collaborative Conversations on the Continent.” It was a chance to interact directly with the Ghanaian Dance Ensemble, and I was traveling with dancers from UCI’s Insight jazz ensemble, even though I do not have any experience in jazz dance. I am a bboy, or a breakdancer, and my culture comes from a mixture of African American and Latino cultures in New York City. However, I had always heard that bboying had specific ties to traditional West African culture. I wanted to investigate the deeper roots or original bboying. I had also just completed an MFA in music at UCI. My thesis focused on the differences in breakdancers who performed to live music to those who performed to pre-recorded music. I had also organized live music events for breakdancers called “Live Cyphers.” These Live Cyphers were not only very popular among bboys, but also served as integration tool for street dancers like poppers, whackers, and lockers, as well as local jazz musicians. The cross-pollination was highly successful at creating new styles and building a stronger, healthier community.

My biggest fear going into Africa was the level of my own bboy skills compared to the Ghanaians. Would I be able to compete with African bboys and interact with them at their level? I imagined that bboys in Africa, the motherland, would be miles ahead of me, but I had no idea. My fears and assumptions drove me to train to the brink of serious injury before my



*Joe (front) battling Bboy Machine (center)*

departure, so that I arrived in Accra with my right hand in an ace bandage. I knew I would not only be representing myself on the continent, but every bboy and bgirl I know here on the west coast of the United States. I felt I needed to represent my culture and the amazing dancers at UCI who have enriched my life. Most of all, I felt the responsibility of being the lone representative of the community called Bboys Anonymous, a UCI Breakdance Club. I wanted to enrich myself in traditional African culture and bring as much of it as I could back to my breakdance club and our Live Cyphers.

Another part of me felt guilty for being able to go to Africa. Though it had always been a dream of mine, I felt guilt about my African American friends. I imagined they might think things like: "Why do you get to go to Africa and not me?" and "It's my motherland not yours, it

should be me!" These assumptions I carried like baggage to Africa would eventually be totally destroyed. Because in reality, Africa is everyone's motherland regardless of skin tone, and what I found in Ghana was an unfathomable interconnected experience that defies articulation. In this article, I want to describe my encounters, which were life-changing.

Upon arrival I immediately wanted to dig into the bboy scene in Accra, the capital city, but found that I simply didn't have the time. Our schedule had us working with the Ghanaian Dance Ensemble at the University of Ghana, Legon for the majority of the day. After our first few workshops, I realized that not a single member of the Ghanaian National Ensemble had any bboy skills, because they were a group of concert dancers. Yet they possessed a certain quality of movement that resembled top rock, whacking, and housing combined. It's a certain stance, a half squat, combined with about a forty-five degree forward slant to the torso, and a swinging motion to the center back that is independent of the movement of the limbs. The combination of these factors made their dance seem aesthetically fluid and high energy. Once I was able to grasp the concept, I realized that my normal top rock took more energy and was less efficient at displaying a dynamic style. I realized that for many bboys in California, the goal of dancing in a circle is to get the crowd to cheer, and they do whatever it takes. When I compared my top rock and the new way I was learning to move in Ghana, I realized that their traditional way of moving was more effective and took less energy to execute.

Though there were no bboys in the National Ensemble, they certainly had acrobatic skills. One of their movements immediately caught my attention. I called it the "Glide-Swipe," because it resembles a rotating power move bboys call a swipe, combined with a GLIDING floor movement known as a Zulu spin. A traditional Zulu spin is a part of a bboy foundation, executed in a squat with flailing arms leading and supporting the body as it circles on the floor. In Ghana, the dancers' arms make the traditional Airflare or Swipe movement, while the

legs remain on the ground and sort of glide around the torso. One of the dancers had the move so fast and so smooth I wondered what my bboy friends back home would think when they saw it. I tried to learn it, and though I got the move down, the speed at which is necessary to create the glide illusion is still slightly beyond my capacity. I learned that the movement was part of their traditional repertoire, but they didn't know a name for it. Back at home, I asked around and found out that the "mystery move" I tried to perfect in Ghana is in fact related to an old-school New York move called a "hurricane," seeming to provide a direct link between Ghana and New York breaking.

As a group of mostly white dancers in black Africa, we stood out completely. In some sense we also defied some of the African assumptions. Some of my new friends in the Ghanaian National Ensemble would tell me things like "Ghanaians weren't used to seeing white people who could dance," or in my particular case, a white man who was strong, able to dance at their level, or improvise music like they could. Their perspective was limited by the type of white people that normally visit: non-athletic people who either can't or don't interact with the local cypher culture. I use the bboy phrase "cypher culture," which describes dancing and interacting in a circle, because that's something that comes from this part of the world. Ghanaians are constantly improvising, often in a circle. Whether it's dancing, or joking, or singing, or making rhythms, they have a knowledge that has been passed down through generations in what bboys now call the cypher, an improvisatory communal space. Ghanaian children are taught traditional rhythms from the time they are born. Parents literally tap rhythms on their body and get the children to move in ways that can make them part of the community.

I didn't get my first taste of Ghanaian bboying until our group traveled to Cape Coast and Elmina Castle, formerly one of the main centers for export of slaves to the new world. Wherever our tour bus went, we seemed to cause a sensation. Crowds would gather around and people would try to sell us everything from food,

to paintings, or jewelry. As we arrived at Elmina Castle, the usual crowd of street vendors and spectators surrounded our bus, asking us as many questions as they could while we quickly moved towards the castle for our tour. I told one young man we were dancers from California. He asked what type of dancing I did, and when I told him I was bboy, his face lit up, and he quickly ran off into the center of town. Inside the castle, I found myself absolutely disgusted by the sights, and the indescribable smell of 400 years of slavery. I was moved into that unsavory history and felt like I could see it happening all around me. It was literally sickening to my stomach. After the grueling and highly detailed tour, I emerged from the castle shaken. But what I found outside the castle quickly erased the horrible experience within minutes, and replaced it with today's Ghanaian spirit. The young man who had run off, it turned out, had called out the town breakdance champion, "Bboy Machine," to challenge me to a battle on the grass right in front of the ancient slave fort. As a true bboy, I couldn't refuse.

I remember wondering why this guy had the same name as a famous California bboy. (It turns out he didn't know and has since become Bboy Elmina Machine.) I was suddenly incredibly nervous, thinking to myself that they just wanted to humiliate me—the white bboy, who got smoked in front of the slave castle. I could hear their voices in my head. I imagined them bragging to each other about it, so I decided right then and there to break to the best of my ability and battle Machine hard. His first move sets told me everything. He had no top rock, and no foundation footwork; his first real move was walking halos on the grass to a head-hollow back freeze. This is a high level acrobatic movement but nothing out of the ordinary for Southern California bboying. Basically this meant that he was limited to acrobatic tricks and had no classic bboy repertoire. I decided I would nickel and dime him at first—in other words, only show him basic foundations and save my best moves for last so I could exhaust his move sets. This is also a classic California warm-up strategy. Machine had obviously had time to warm up before I got out of the castle and I was coming into the battle cold.

Bboys exchange sets of movements in a battle, and after my first few sets I noticed the crowd. It felt like the entire fishing village that surrounds the castle had stopped what they were doing to watch me battle Machine. Once the Ghanaians, and even Machine himself, realized that I was a legitimate bboy, everyone started to get a little crazy. We even had what I call a hype man. One of Machine's friends would run through the circle after every set, getting everyone to cheer by yelling in what sounded like the local languages, Twi or Ga. Though no one knew how to "soul clap" or make the right rhythms, there was no need to hype up the crowd—they were already there.

The battle was getting more and more intense, round after round, and by about my fifth pass, I was starting to feel like I could finally pull out my better moves. Machine must have been feeling the same; he started to pull out the most insane acrobatic flipping I had ever seen. He could back handspring with one hand and immediately hand-spin, or 1990 (a Bboy power move), upon landing. I knew after that move I had to give him my best set. I used my power moves, my flares and windmills in rapid succession on the grass. I could hear the crowds going nuts as I did these movements. I didn't know why basic power movements like flares and windmills would bring out such a response; I felt that Machine's back handspring 1990 was a better move. But by the time I finished my set I saw the look in Machine's eye change. Had I just defeated him? It seemed like it, because he immediately repeated his walking halos instead of pulling out something new. Perhaps my instinct just took over, or I sensed victory, maybe, and I copied his walking halos but with a variation, I kept my legs in a lotus freeze. At that moment the battle ended.

Even though Machine claims I won that battle, I have to say we tied. He did movements I have never seen before, and likewise, I did movements that, even though they are highly commercialized in the United States, he had never seen in person before. Ghanaian bboys, I found out, are a product of their environment, and that can provide challenges. They have no good places to practice, only dirt, grass, and concrete.

Learning proper windmill technique requires smooth flooring, a luxury that is hard to come by in the Cape Coast region. The lack of regular internet access also plays a part in the level of the Ghanaian Bboy. Machine had never heard of Bboyworld.com, an online community of international breakdancers that includes a myriad of instructional videos, free music, and training guides. Though Ghana is a well-developed nation in many ways, internet in Ghana remains remarkably inefficient. Access is limited to relatively expensive and crowded internet cafes that run on very slow modems. The idea of watching a video clip over and over again to learn a movement is currently out of reach for the average Ghanaian, versus the ease of access for the average American. In retrospect, I can see how I had gained incredible insights into flares by watching clips of the movement being performed over and over again. I couldn't imagine myself being able to learn them without this valuable assistance.

By the end of the battle, Machine and I had become instant best friends. Even though the crowd wanted more, I could tell Machine was tired—as was I—so I waved my hand towards the crowd and drew Machine close, indicating that the show was over. I told him not to worry about the crowd anymore, we needed to learn from each other and see what moves we could exchange in the short time we had. Machine seemed to want so many of my movements that I didn't have time to learn any of his. I spent the remaining time teaching him airchair, airbabies, flares, and windmills. Dancing with Bboy Machine was possibly the most profound moment of my life. Having to leave Elmina Castle was a painful experience, but I realized that the battle with Machine had completely replaced the negative experience of the slave castle with a positive one. Rather than images of its horror filling my mind, all I could think about was the champion of the Cape Coast, Bboy Machine.

My next Ghanaian bboy experience came later that day as we traveled from Elmina to Cape Coast Castle itself. Cape Coast Castle was another major slave exporting fortress and is quite a bit larger in scope than Elmina. Like a repeating

pattern, I again found myself physically disgusted by the castle. This time when I exited I found myself drawn to the sound of a nearby drum circle. As I approached, many of the drummers' eyes seemed to turn towards me. Not knowing what else to do, I smiled and did a small toprock to the drumming, just so I could show them that I wasn't just some classic white tourist but a dancer, someone who could relate to them. But as soon as I finished toprocking I was immediately challenged! A drummer jumped out of the circle and started to toprock in front of me. I showed this new challenger a little bboy footwork and another drummer jumped out into the circle and did an invert (an inverted handstand). I followed his invert with hand hops, and before I knew it I was battling an entire bboy crew one at a time! I eventually made it all the way up to their boss, a heavyset guy named Bboy Atto whose one and only move was incredible. He held a perfect one-handed handstand, then switched to the other hand, then rotated his entire torso around into a super hollowback, a bridge-pose with his feet mere inches off the ground. The only thing that once again cemented my place among such company was my flares and windmills, except this time I performed on concrete to the detriment of my skin. Though my movements were as clean as I could possibly make them, I still came out of it bleeding from several scrapes. But I also came out of it with the cheering and respect of this Ghanaian crew.

The crew's name was Korye, and I found out that they are a traditional dance group that also did bboying. I found out a lot of bboys in Ghana are also drummers, and they subsist along the coast as street performers. I also discovered that it was cheaper for them to own drums and make a drum ensemble than to buy equipment to play music. This is the opposite of the United States, and ultimately this is precisely what my master's thesis was all about—how live music makes a difference. Though Korye had an economic disadvantage by not owning a stereo, they had a dance advantage by practicing to live drums only. Breakdancing to live drums is a much more beneficial experience for a bboy. It allows more room for creativity and expands the

dance because the dance is ultimately based on a drum language. It is more raw and more real to experience breakdance to live drums than to a stereo. The proof of it was obvious in Korye's skills. They were all fantastic dancers in possession of one or two acrobatic bboy tricks apiece. Once again the different movements I saw shocked me because of their high degree of difficulty and originality.

Having to leave Bboy Machine and Korye behind was difficult for me as we headed back to Accra from Cape Coast. I had so much that I could have given them, and they had so much they could have given me. It wasn't until nearly the end of my trip that I met another bboy. I met Bboy Stanley from No Limit Crew, in Accra through some connections I made at the University of Ghana, Legon. No Limit Crew had just taken second place in the National Street Dance competition in Ghana, and although I didn't get a chance to dance with Bboy Stanley I was able to get a 20-minute interview. He related to me all the ins and outs of the bboy scene in Ghana. First of all, he confirmed that there is a serious lack of adequate practice spots in term of smooth flooring. Most bboys end up having to practice on dirt, grass, or concrete. Not surprisingly, then, tumbling or flipping is very easy for them to pick up because it doesn't require a smooth floor, and it's been a part of their traditional cultural dances. But things like windmills, flares, and any sort of spin that requires a smooth floor is next to impossible. Stanley told me that he had never seen a Ghanaian bboy do a proper headspin or halo, but things like flipping, handhops, and airflares were common tricks.

It surprised me the most when I asked him what kinds of music Ghanaian Bboys danced to. He listed off names of artists like Chris Brown, Ne-yo, and several others that I knew were not in the realm of the bboy musical canon. Essentially, they were dancing to the wrong type of music according to bboy tradition, just American mainstream radio, not Afro-Funk. This explained why bboys like Machine didn't have any of the toprock or foundation movements in their vocabulary. If breakdance comes from a drum

language and you try to learn it with music that lacks the proper rhythm, you end up not manifesting the traditional body rhythms of the dance. But then I thought back to Korye, who didn't even have a stereo to learn with. Their body rhythms and toprocks were perfected beyond anything I could imagine, and my only conclusion was that it was because they were drummers and practiced to live drums only.

I learned from Stanley more about the technological gap as well. When I asked him if he had heard of Bboyworld.com, he, like Bboy Machine, shook his head. Without regular internet access, Ghanaian bboys pick up movements from movies like "Step Up," and only from one or two viewings. Stanley also told me bboying wasn't popular locally, even though Ghanaians pride themselves in dance. Maybe they have not yet realized how far bboying has gone without regular internet access to inform them. When Ghanaians realize they can get fame and notoriety from breakdance, they will surely absorb it and make it their own. Stanley agreed, claiming that once Ghanaians learn more about breakdancing globally, Ghana will emerge as one of the great breakdance epicenters of the world. I believe him. The fact that a lot of modern bboy movements have been part of their traditional dances for generations makes me realize how fantastic Ghanaian bboying can one day be. In fact, it's already happening. Bboys like Machine, Stanley, and others are emerging, and even just meeting someone like me or accessing the global bboy community via the internet can help inspire them to greater heights. When I related to Stanley what I found at Cape Coast with Korye, and what was going on in Southern California with Live Cypher, which uses only live music, he suddenly put two and two together and told me that he had an idea—he would stop listening to American radio and start dancing to live drums instead, bringing his whole crew along with him.

I left Ghana with a sense that we needed more time together, and that I had only scratched the surface of a vast ocean of culture. In the world there are several epicenters of breakdance culture. Southern California can boast this title, and someday Coastal Ghana will be able to claim this



title as well. Historically speaking, the roots of the bboy culture are there, one of the predecessors being from the Fante tribe on the Ghanaian coast. Traditionally, their gangs or militias, called Asafos, featured a flag dancer, who would dance acrobatics along with his Asafo flag. Flag Dancers would confront each other and battle each other with acrobatics, the epitome of what bboys do. You can also hear the rhythms of

bboying in Fante regions, a celebratory drumming style call Kpanlogo, invented along the Cape Coast by fishermen after winning independence from the British in the 1950s. This drumming style embodies the rhythms of break dance, and its influence can be clearly seen in the music of the bboy canon, established in the United States. To have learned these truths first hand was a truly eye opening experience for this bboy.

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Joe Knox is a recent MFA graduate of the UCI Music Department and a special guest writer for this DMJ issue. To find out more about him, go to [www.irisavenuerecords.com](http://www.irisavenuerecords.com).



*Joe and Bboy Machine*

# Tapping in Africa

by Darina Littleton

A crucial part of the college experience that all students should undergo, in my opinion, is travel and study abroad. For a dancer, getting the chance to travel in college is more than just an amazing opportunity; it is great preparation for the lifestyle they will possibly encounter throughout their future dance career. Traveling exposes the dancer to new, fresh elements of their art, which allows them to keep up with its constant growth and development, something very important to the success of a dancer.

This past summer, I traveled with UCI's jazz dance ensemble, *Insight*, to the city of Accra, Ghana, in West Africa. The purpose of this trip was to research specific topics of our individual choices and to engage with the Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE). We spent three weeks at the University of Ghana, Legon, attending dance and drumming workshops, tourist sites, and rehearsing and collaborating with GDE. We also heard lectures that focused on African studies, women's studies, slavery, Ghanaian traditions, and the role of music and dance in their society. My specific research focus was the relationship between Ghanaian music and dance. I wanted to delve deep into the differences between Ghanaian and Western dance and how Ghanaians specifically felt about and responded to the music, knowing that, for them, dance and music are one—something we are not necessarily taught here.

In the Ghanaian context, music and dance go hand and hand; music dictates what the meaning, pace and style of the movement should be and without it, dance is just meaningless movement. Often, American dancers get so accustomed to listening to only the basic beat (whole count rhythms) of music that they are unaware of the syncopated rhythms. There is a deeper level of listening that is required to relate to the complexity of polyrhythmic music. A lot of times, even great jazz, modern, or even hip-hop dancers will be off rhythm at certain points in the music, which is something that doesn't make sense to me at all. Being unaware of the music is

not really an option for those who are involved in dance in Africa, where dancers must allow themselves to be fully immersed in rhythm of the drums. This constant trade of energy between the drummer and the dancer calls for no 'down' time and forces both the dancer and the drummer to stay completely engaged for the entire performance.

One reason why the music-dance relationship is so important to me is because I am a tap dancer. It's the style of dance that I was introduced to before anything else, when I was a mere toddler. Although it is not my focus in college, it is my main forte in dance, and I have been blessed to have trained under and worked with some of the all-time greats, including the late Fayard Nicholas, Arthur Duncan, Savion Glover, Paul and Arlene Kennedy, Dianne Walker, and Jason Samuels Smith. I continue to teach tap and perform nationally with the Kennedy Tap Company. Tap dance evolved in the mid-1600s with strong influence from both West African and the British Isles. With the perfect blend of African rhythms and performance style fused with European footwork techniques, American tap dance was created.

Tap is all about syncopation and rhythm. The main aspect of tap is that one's feet make the rhythm, as opposed to an instrument; therefore it is crucial that the tap dancer keep that steady beat. More than any other American dance form, tap is at one with the music, in that we tappers are both "dancing" with the upper body, while creating our own music with our feet. The special thing about tap is that it can be done either with music or a cappella without changing the effect of the style. But tap, or at least advanced tap, has always been more a bit rare, in that there aren't many dancers who stick with it past the age of about 7. In the past, tap, like African dance, wasn't taught by professional teachers in studios, as ballet or modern have always been; it was most often taught informally by either observation or imitation.

Thinking about Ghana and what I could personally contribute with my research, I decided that it would be both interesting and challenging to delve deeper into the relationship between tap dance and drumming. I knew that this particular study would take my research to a whole new level. I hoped to have the chance to team up with a master drummer and work on a tap/drumming collaboration that would be performed at the final performance. Luckily, within our non-stop, tight schedule, I was finally able to meet with Christopher Ametefe, our drumming workshop teacher and the master drummer of the Ghana Dance Ensemble—two days before the performance!

Upon starting the collaboration, neither of us knew exactly what to expect or how the project would pan out. This was a brand new experience for us both because I had never worked with a drummer doing tap before and vice versa. I assumed that he, being the master drummer would lead by playing rhythms that my feet could respond to. However, he assumed the complete opposite and asked me to show him what I had so he could follow. Knowing we had to get a whole piece together in only two days with extremely limited rehearsal time, we just had to go for it. Christopher had been drumming for our jazz/African rehearsals but hadn't seen me tap at all yet. I started to improv some of my most advanced steps to see what he could work with and what felt right with the drums. He stopped me after a few counts, in awe of my skill and with how in tune I was with rhythm in general.

After seeing that I actually knew what I was doing, he got extremely excited about the collaboration and immediately started to try to figure out which rhythms would go along with my steps. I would do about an 8-count and stop; he would hum it, try to play it, and then asked me to repeat the rhythms until he got the sounds practically perfect. The first part of my piece was a unison section that involved me and Christopher sounding almost as one musically. Because this section was mainly about unison, he was very adamant about the drum sounding just like my feet. Once he would get one 8-count right, we would move on to the next. I continued to explore

different steps while he did the same for the corresponding rhythms until we both were happy with the sound and the skill level of both.

Something that was very interesting about the process was that the more complex my taps were, the easier it was for him to play the identical beats. However, the easiest steps took him forever to get the proper sound for. For instance, we spent about a half and hour just getting his sound dead-on with the “time step.” After awhile, I was even able to say things like, “Try playing bass, tone, slap [these are drum terms that I learned from him in the drumming workshop] for ‘and-uh-one’—it might flow better.” He was very impressed by this, wondering how I was able to figure that out before he was. Our constant exchange allowed us to continue challenging each other and bringing out the best in each other. The process was strenuous, yet fun the entire time, because we both loved the ideas we presented to each other throughout, and we both learned from each other.

My final choreographic project, performed during our final performance in Ghana, started with a small group of us dancing the basic “time-step” and “shim-sham” to his drumming rhythms. He played a rhythm that sounded extremely close to our “shuffle hop salap salap step.” For example, he bounced back and forth between doing tone, slap, and bass movements in syncopation with our hop shuffles and salaps. Once the simple group tap steps were completed, the other dancers did a traveling step to exit while I branched off into the solo portion of the piece. This part involved a unison section, in which his drum beats would match the rhythms created by my feet, followed by a call and response section that either he or I would lead, and then a climactic ending in which the rhythms blended and corresponded rhythmically but were more complex than the unison portion.

This was hands-down my favorite part of the trip, being able to work with someone of Christopher Ametefe's caliber and have a true exchange, opening my eyes and his, both culturally and artistically. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will always cherish and be able to draw from for future projects.

# A Home Away From Home

*A look at the Noyam African Dance Institute in Ghana*

*by Katie Montoya*

On an early morning bus ride over a windy, unpaved road, I could never have suspected what was in store for me at the top of Akwapim Mountain. In the greater Accra region of Ghana, West Africa, in the middle of a beautiful forest stood a solid concrete theater. The small, iron lettering beside the door read “Noyam,” meaning progress or development in the Ga-Dangbe language of Ghana. We were welcomed by the many children who call the theater home, as they grow up learning from the residents who, for the most part, have no other home but the Noyam theater. My fellow travelers and I came to be in Ghana through the UCI project called “Collaborative Conversations on the Continent.” Directed by jazz dance professor, Sheron Wray, the three-week venture aimed to prompt an interdisciplinary, intellectual exchange between the University of Ghana and UCI, foregrounding dance and music.

The Noyam Institute was one small, yet noteworthy stop on our journey. Walking into the building, I was immediately impressed by the size of the elevated stage and the height of the ceiling that had beautiful hanging tin sculptures that seemed to float and spin slowly with the breeze. My colleagues and I took everything in as we settled down on the wooden benches provided for the audience. As the children curiously introduced themselves to the many foreigners, I marveled at the stage and its simple set made of giant tree branches, cardboard boxes, and sturdy tree trunks. The many drums that sat waiting to be played looked as if they were in their natural habitat, mimicking the forest they first came from. I felt in this moment a certain familiarity with the Noyam theater, a feeling that was strengthened as the day went on.

The Noyam African Dance Institute is a non-profit educational institution that focuses on training dancers in traditional and contemporary African dance. Founded by Professor Francis Nii-Yartey, former Artistic Director of the Ghana



Dance Ensemble and dance professor at the University of Ghana, the institute strives to “help create a positive perception of people about dance as a dynamic art form and a serious profession capable of contributing to the socio-economic development of Africa” (Noyam’s Mission Statement). Now in its twelfth year of operation, the institute values dance as a social tool that can arouse change and activism, as well as a tool for connecting cultures and breaking barriers. Noyam’s curriculum includes traditional and contemporary African dance forms as well as music instruction, composition, and improvisation.

The institute is intended for younger students and offers general education courses, but also has a professional training program and a company of dancers who perform and travel around Ghana and around the rest of the world including the United States, Senegal, and the Netherlands. The Noyam facilities not only consist of the theater and studio, but also an extensive performing arts library, offices, and residences for company members. We had the chance to meet and dance with many company members during our one-day workshop. Within our short visit, I learned so much about the style, values, and approaches that the institute takes in teaching and choreographing.



As Professor Nii-Yartey was out of the country at the time, our group was under the instruction of Nii Tete Yartey, Nii-Yartey's son and a current graduate dance student at the University of Ghana. The signature of Professor Nii-Yartey is the genre of Dance-Drama, which he first created for the Ghana Dance Ensemble, then later for Noyam. Before departing for Ghana, I had committed my research to Nii-Yartey's creations to better understand the theatrical elements that went into these pieces and the co-existent relationship of dance with drama in his works. What I found by viewing recorded Noyam performances and through the guidance of Nii Tete Yartey was that a Dance-Drama combines acting, storytelling, and dance through the use of pantomime, character relationships, movements showing clear emotions, and occasionally spoken text or monologues. Ghanaian dance lends itself to Dance-Dramas because of a common African dance characteristic called, "Movement aspects of customary behavior," as explained to us by Nii Tete, meaning that the origins of some African dances (specifically Ghanaian in this case) come from movement done by everyday citizens.

In the case of the Ghanaian war dance, *Adzogbo*, which we learned while in Ghana, the movements are not unlike that of a warrior's. The stance is low, the marches progress forward in an intimidating manner, and there is even a pantomimed battle in the dance. Other examples include dances that came from the movements of fishermen along the coast. Because these movements have such specificity and human qualities to them, Professor Nii Yartey has been very successful at expanding them into interesting storylines. Another outstanding aspect of the Noyam's Dance-Dramas is that they often take critical issues from the surrounding community, such as poverty and the environment, and comment on them through dance, drama, and music. The result they call "Total Theater," a reflection of contemporary life using all of the senses and all capabilities of the theatrical performer.

I had my first hands-on encounter with contemporary African dance when we had the

chance to collaboratively create choreography with the Noyam dancers. Our task was to use a small phrase from the traditional dance, *Adzogbo*, and expand or modify it to create a new piece. Another part of the instruction was that our groups must also decide on a theme to dance about (reminiscent of the storytelling elements of a Dance-Drama). In creating the movement, I noticed that my vocabulary was, naturally, different from the Noyam dancers' because of differences in our training. However, what we had in common was a substantial manipulation of tempo, movement quality, and body-part initiation that influenced the making of the contemporary movement. The Noyam dancers were also better inclined to choreograph within the chosen theme or story, a task that was perhaps less practiced by my peers and me. The resulting piece was a melting pot of many styles and influences, but the origin of the movement was the same, which gave the piece cohesion and structure.

Even after contributing to the creation of a contemporary African dance piece, and learning from the company members, the most inspirational part of the day for me was the afternoon break, during which we had the choice to stay at the center or venture into the nearby town. I chose to stay at the theater with a small group so that I could have the chance to further my research by talking with the dancers. While speaking with Jeremiah, a junior company member, I learned all about the struggles of being a professional dancer in Ghana. The pay is low, and part-time jobs aren't really an option for the committed dancer. However, I saw in Jeremiah a passion for dance that made the lifestyle more than bearable. As he told the small group, "Life is a dance." It made sense to me then that Jeremiah would make dance his life.

My favorite part of that interlude was the "dance break" we had on stage. Michael Jackson was thrown on the speaker system, and those who stayed behind proceeded to play with the company, exchanging vocabulary, meshing hip hop and African styles, challenging each other, and learning through call and response. Even though the day was already filled with non-stop

dancing, this was purely for fun and recreation. The approach to dance as a celebration of community, friendship, and life was something I encountered again and again in Ghana, and is something I will carry with me wherever I go. While at Noyam, I remembered that I had in fact gone into dance because it was fun. My reasons for investing my time and energy in theater expanded and deepened with my education, but that one “fun”damental reason occasionally got pushed by the wayside in favor of hard work.

The Noyam Institute restored in me the feelings I had about dance when I started at my own institute at a young age. The decorative iron footsteps that hung on the back wall of Noyam’s theater were so similar to the footsteps that lined

the walkway to my hometown studio, they could have been made by the same artist. The familiar feeling I had all day came from a sensation of coming back to my roots. To value the arts as a tool for the betterment of society, and to value dance as an expressive outlet that can shape a person’s relationship to the world around them, are principles that I grew up with, and rediscovered again at Noyam.

I really admire the Noyam Institute for striving to educate through the arts with even fewer material resources than we have in America. I found this to be a truly impressive organization, and one that I will continue to admire from across the Atlantic Ocean.

# Dancing with Purpose in Ghana

*by Jenna Tatone*

In August of 2010 I traveled to Ghana, West Africa with an amazing group of researchers that included undergraduates, graduates, and faculty from an array of different disciplines. The project was called “Collaborative Conversation on the Continent.” We all traveled there in hopes of an exchange of knowledge with the Ghana Dance Ensemble (GDE), one of the country’s national companies, and the students and faculty at the University of Ghana, Legon, where the GDE is based. We participated in lectures and classes as well as each had our own individual research projects. My research question was why we dance and more specifically why Ghanaians dance. Is dancing inherent, and do we happen to follow our families’ habits? Is it instinctual and just natural, or is it a way to appear to have a cool and confident edge?

I knew this question of why we dance could only lead me to credible answers because there is no wrong answer. I also knew it would be a way for me to break cultural barriers and start ongoing conversations with the Ghana Dance Ensemble members. Saying why we dance is admittedly difficult because the answer might not be concrete or really measurable, but it was a way to start the conversation. It was also an instrument to realize the ways in dance can be an international means of communication. In Ghana today, do they use dance to produce change and if so, how is this accomplished? From my experiences there, I think their desire and need for modernization literally motivates them to move.

From my research thus far, I construe that dance in Ghanaian Society could now be more important than ever because of the powerful emotions and stories it can hold. I say this because of where their society is now. The eras of slavery and colonialism were not too long ago. Ghana became an independent nation in 1957 and was the first African region to gain independence from European rule. I learned there is still healing that needs to take place from the colonial era. There are consistently new issues arising with the ladder-like climb to modernization because of the

many layers of philosophical, religious, and political beliefs that exist in this single nation. From my observation, Ghanaians take much pride and passion in their country; I did not meet anyone that did not possess this loyal mentality.

One of the ways which dance is essential and important is because it is a source of therapy, meaning that it is a way to convey feelings of hurt, sorrow, celebration and joy. This is true of dance in the west and in Ghana. From my conversations with the dance faculty at the University of Ghana, Legon, I learned that dance is used to bring together the major tribe groups of the Asante, Ga, and Fante. It is also a part of the international healing process. Dance is one of the ways which Ghanaians cope and recover from the domestic and international slave trades, the remnants of which are still present in their society. We visited two slave dungeon sites while we were there, and it was an emotional and touching experience. The UG Dance Chair, Professor Oh Nii Sowah (who is a UCI Dance MFA alumni and played a great role in my research while we were in Ghana), told me that the dances about slavery are therapeutic for their people and that dancing these stories can show a truth about slavery that is otherwise hard to articulate. “Oral and musical history is very important to the healing process,” he said, “because it allows the story to be told as is.”

As a national symbol of culture, the Ghana Dance Ensemble has a great responsibility. They need to make sure that traditional dances do not lose their integrity while standardizing them for the stage. They first began the process of standardization by hiring dancers from different tribes and different areas of Ghana to gather the dances from different regions. From reading one of the articles that was assigned to us before leaving for the trip, “The Politics of Dance: Changing Representations of the Nation in Ghana” by Katherina Schramm, I learned that dances were shortened and adapted to the proscenium stage, making them more accessible to people outside Ghanaian culture. By unifying

and standardizing a national repertoire, they are striving for “unity in diversity,” bringing together various cultural groups with different structures and spiritual belief systems. The ensemble’s responsibility, says Schramm, is to carry a united national front for Ghana, and to link its citizens to the rest of the world.

To give you an idea of why Ghanaians dance, I would like to share an example of one of the standardized war dances performed. This dance is supposed to only be performed by men, although we performed it as a group while we were there. It is called *Ajdzobo*, a war dance that states in movement, “You and I will fight!” The Ghanaians dance as if their life depends on it, which, in the past, it very well might have, back when the *Ajdzobo* accompanied real wars. This is a dance of their ancestors; war dances like this were used to boost the morale of the tribe in hopes of being victorious. The *Ajdzobo* costumes consist of leg and chest wraps and a full skirt that will flop as the dancer shakes his hips and jump up and down. The costume adds to the purpose of the dance by showing the audience how they would have looked entering into war.

A lot of our research while in Ghana was embodied knowledge; we learned dances and how to drum out polyrhythms. We had lectures with professors there at the University of Ghana, Legon and would fit in more intimate meetings with faculty and grad students as we could. Through these conversations, I feel I was able to learn a lot about the dance community at the University and also had a glimpse of a private dance institution nearby, as well as seeing social dancing in nearby downtown Accra. In Ghana, dance knowledge is primarily handed down verbally and through performance and drum language. Traditional African Dance, which is the primary focus of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, is a collection of stories handed down; it is not stagnant, according to the beliefs of the University of Ghana Dance Department.

According to Professor Sowah, traditional dance is made for public consumption as a history lesson and to educate young people about what should never be repeated. He also talks about dance being used to denote the cycles of life—

birth, harvest, puberty, marriages, and funerals. Dancing takes place everywhere, church, market places, in the home, groves, and work places. Dance is a tool for entertainment, religion, and documentation. We witnessed evidence of dance being used for documentation by watching the ensemble perform for us stories of war, the lives of chiefs and queen-mothers, and through some of their newer contemporary work that included themes of travel and craft making.

Through my observations of the children and young adults at the university, a love of dance can be triggered from a very early age in Ghana. Growing up there, you may constantly be surrounded by rhythms and beats. Children have the opportunity to develop artistically at a very early age. Our drumming instructor, when asked how he got into making and playing drums, said that drumming is what his family does, so that is what he does. There is a strong emphasis on carrying the craft of your family if they have one, and to keep your family’s spirit and talents alive. I witnessed a strong sense of pride and honor in traditional ways of life.

Ultimately, I had a lot of fun on this trip, because the life and vibrancy Ghanaians have when they are dancing is very contagious! The largest dance studio at the university is a big, open space with a wooden floor, with open walkways and red earth just at the edges of the room. It felt so much like a natural setting, we could feel every slight shift in weather. The drums that were played during rehearsal were so loud and habitual that I could not help but let them enter into my soul. To not join into the passionate environment that was always set for us would have been disrespectful to them. They strongly believe that if you are not dancing to your fullest, it is a waste of energy and it is rude to your community of other dancers. Professor Sowah told us this saying from the Ga people, “He or She who has never danced has never lived.”

Dance in Ghanaian society is normal and it is everywhere. It is as natural as brushing your teeth, and for most people it is that much of a daily routine. There are many opportunities to dance socially or professionally. Dance is used



for advertisements not just on television, but in open-air markets and in central gathering areas. While there, I watched dancers in public areas advertising for companies like Cowbell Milk and Delta Soap. During my home-stay, we danced around with the children while we waited for dinner. Most of the children's games incorporate dance.

For my research project, I asked many dancers about their reasons for dancing and about their careers. Some of them were in the Ghana Dance Ensemble and some of them were dance students or considered themselves social dancers. One of the responses I gathered was from an individual for whom English was a second language, so I really appreciated the vulnerability he exposed when answering my questions. Other than adding some punctuation, I wanted to leave the statement as much in his own words as possible:

I love to dance because dance is my life. I always think of dance and even dream of dance when I sleep. Dance tells me what to do when I am confused; dance is like a father and a mother to me. Oh yes, I eat dance, drink dance, and sleep in

dance. I choose dance to be my career because it is my life and I do not want to do anything apart from it. It was also my dream to be a dancer when I was a child. I am also going to do a project on dance to let people know that dance is life and a good career.

In Ghana, it was so inspirational to see the vivaciousness in their dancing, and to hear their passionate answers to my questions. I hope this information can serve as inspiration to remember that when performing or choreographing, dance can always have an underlying purpose. Even if it seems the purpose is simple or silly, remembering to incorporate a committed attitude may make the dance translate to your audience better or may make a performance more memorable. It can be difficult to always integrate these ideas of soul, life, and community into your practice; remember your own personal reasons for dancing. This trip has jump-started my original reasons for dancing as well as added new importance to my dancing. I hope our research group can keep embodying this knowledge and spreading this sense of excitement and texture we got in Ghana around UC Irvine and our surrounding community.

## A Collaborative Process Under the Spanish Sun

by Lindsay Berliner

Throughout my time spent as a dance major at UC Irvine, I can honestly say that the most memorable moments were those spent dancing abroad in the streets of Southern Spain. For the last two summers, students from the dance department at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts have had the opportunity to participate in a Dance Improvisational Intensive in Frigiliana, Spain, under the direction of Professor Lisa Naugle. Dancers, composers, and musicians collaborated to develop improvisational works for several concerts held throughout the course of the trip in 2009 and in 2010. So many moments were memorable because they were completely different from anything we had previously learned and experienced.

The processes we opened up to while in Spain defined the paths that many of the dancers are currently going in as they develop their dance skills, approach to learning, and perspective on personal identity within a community. Each student went to the south of Spain with different goals in mind that we discussed individually with Professor Naugle prior to the trip, and each returned to Southern California having learned something unique about not only themselves but those around them. In this paper, I focus my attention on several aspects of this program including: (1) the importance of travelling abroad to achieve certain goals and develop processes, (2) a perspective on pedagogy, improvisation, and performance from Professor Lisa Naugle, (3) reflections in writing and discussions from students who went to Frigiliana in the summer of 2009 and/or in the summer of 2010, and (4) my own personal reflection from both summers.

Although some people who are unfamiliar with improvisation and are outside of the dance program may hesitate to agree, there is a necessity to submerging ourselves in a new, different environment. In this particular case, it had an enormous impact on all of us, for we were able to discover new feelings and thoughts about movement and share those developments with the rest of the ensemble. In our everyday UCI life,



*Lindsay Berliner (left) and Rachel Berman*

we are constantly thinking about what time it is, when the next class is, and how far across campus we need to run in a mere ten minutes. Also, the frustrations of getting a grade on explorative work can foster negative feelings and ultimately lead to hesitation in improvisational material. The stresses of “normalcy” can create a taxing situation, and creative work does not always flourish under such circumstances, which is why we were all eager to disrupt the typical day and take a chance with something new.

In the cultural environment of Andalucía, Spain, natives do not feel “time” as we do in America; therefore we had to adjust to their routine and organize our day in a different way, which gave us all a new outlook on the trip. Third year dance major Katrina Muffley says, “Although as a group we would try very hard to plan rehearsals, eating, and free-time schedules in advance, nothing ever truly turned out the way we planned. We had to make decisions in real time and adapt to various, unplanned situations that came our way.”

When asked if staying in Southern California would have had the same affect as traveling abroad did, dance major Emi Oshima said, “No, it would not have been the same if we

had just stayed in California, because everything was changed by traveling to a place that had a different language, different customs, and even different landscapes.” The Spanish lifestyle encouraged us all to use our free time for reflection, and I do not believe we all would have furthered our genuine desire for transformation if we hadn’t used our time that way throughout the entirety of the trip. Education beyond the boundaries of a traditional university setting inspired us all to find new paths worth investigating.

These changes in our movement and thinking, individual work and group work, and approach to improvisation came about because of the opportunities we were all given by Professor Lisa Naugle. When asked about pedagogy, she says, “I believe in situational learning, which is an approach to learning. In this project, I wanted to set up a situation where students would have many different challenges, not only for the creative process in a collaboration, but in terms of the students as individuals and emerging artists.” Also of utmost importance to Professor Naugle is acting as a support system while each dancer finds his or her own individuality within the group.

A firm believer in the mentoring process, Professor Naugle constantly checked in with us so we all could communicate and truly find our niche in the ensemble. It should also be noted that in the normal course of a school day, it is quite difficult to find the time to really dig down into the nuances of the teaching and learning relationship, but in Spain we were able to find that time to create an ever-growing student-teacher dialogue. The rationale for the trip was to be in a place where all of us could be challenged to explore what it actually means (not just in theory) to be “in the moment”, and once we all realized that, we spent our time wisely with discovery and exploration. As noted by fourth year dance major Maddy Lamond, “The opportunity to dance with familiar faces but in unfamiliar locations provided an interesting movement quality and emotional climate.”

Performance in improvisation is quite a fulfilling experience because we are given

opportunities to work through the weaknesses and build our strengths. Professor Naugle expresses her complete support in performance work because it is directly linked to taking risks based on reaction and producing authentic material. While abroad, she constantly reminded us to have unified moments within the group and make sure to engage as a whole, which we practiced in every performance regardless if it was on the sidewalk, on a stage, or in the Nerja caves.

So many students have been impacted by this opportunity to travel to Spain for improvisation, and it would be impossible to discuss the trip without mentioning the personal growth of my peers. We all applied for funding from UROP, the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, and not only did it allow us the freedom of travelling to Europe, but it also helped each of us define our goals when writing the proposal for our trip. Many students started off with these goals in mind, which immediately catapulted them into a courageous, explorative process.

One element of the trip was the ability to work with a composer and perform to the music he or she had previously recorded, or to work with a musician live. Fourth year major Alysha Shroff described her collaboration with composer Barrie Webb in 2009 as being “a piece that was equally weighted between dance and music.” Those moments when students could speak with a composer, whether formally or informally, were beneficial to the growth of both parties. As Shroff says, “Those times were valuable in understanding how he worked and what I could do to best compliment the work. I enjoyed each and every minute of it.” Maddy Lamond had the opportunity to collaborate with a composer in 2010 and she says that “working with a composer was particularly enlightening. I realized a lot of my own weaknesses as a choreographer as well as an improvisational artist. After working with Caroline Newmann, I soon learned I was almost completely ignorant to the similarities that dancers and musicians share when it comes to choreography and music composition.” Lamond also noted “...both parties must be aware of spatial and environmental difficulties.” This was

something all of us learned while being in such a close relationship with one another.

It was quite impressive to watch the students perform and see the growth each person made on a daily basis. We constantly worked with improvisation as a movement practice and through discussion, and we determined that it is a form that requires constant attention. Like anything else, you cannot perfect it, but you can strive for certain goals to reach each time you produce improvisational material. Emi Oshima put into words exactly what improvisation does to her as a dancer: "It's extremely magical in the sense that when you get to that place where you are fearless, confident, and free as a bird, you discover a side of you that no one can really ever experience, take away, alter, or effect."

For me, this trip to Spain was my opportunity to fully evaluate why I dance and what it means to me, and also to discover the ways it could remain in my life after college. I came into UCI as what many would call a total "bunhead." I had never taken a modern dance class in my life, and the idea of anything other than pink tights in ballet class made me cringe. But after several years of various classes and a true hope to become a more well-rounded dancer, I was certain that travelling to Spain in 2009 was exactly what I needed to develop my own movement vocabulary and help me seriously define the dancer I knew I could be. While in Frigiliana, I could move exactly how I wanted, when I wanted, and where I wanted. There were no limitations and the only requirement was to be completely committed to the work and remain present with everything I created. I will never forget the day we danced in a highly public place for the very first time in Malaga on a very busy street. I could not distinguish between the many emotions I was feeling at that very moment because fear, exhilaration, and maybe a little humiliation were all wrapped up into a tiny, yet hugely significant part of my dance career. These moments were exactly what I needed to break the boundaries of insecurity and expand my curiosity for new movement by disrupting the norm.

Throughout the summer, we held many discussions where we could all reflect and speak through the improvisational process. We spoke of "authenticity" and what that means in improvisation. For me, it became one of my biggest goals for the summer of 2009, and I immediately acknowledged that authentic movement was the most valuable thing I could attain that summer. In improvisation, you can produce a movement just because you feel like it, or you can produce a movement because it legitimately serves a purpose at that exact time. This was difficult for me to distinguish, since in ballet even the smallest step serves a purpose, regardless of intentions. Improvisation was a different battle because creating a canvas with other dancers in real-time meant understanding the surroundings and knowing exactly when that next movement was a priority for the entire group, not just me. Willingness to share a voice and simultaneously create an individual voice is all a part of the process of making an improvisational ensemble work, and what I have found is that through improvisation, I have expanded consciously in a way that allows me to remain present when dancing any form.

In my eyes, my development in 2009 was only furthered after my visit to Spain in 2010. I was able to focus on so many other things besides being in a new location, which gave me the time I needed to take on a new role for myself and in the ensemble. This year, I had the ability to work on an improvisational structure in more of a director's role, and I was able to step back and see what material I thought was necessary to create with the piece of music I worked with. It was important for me to make decisions this year and also say them out loud with more certainty. Last summer was filled with exposure to so many elements, and it only furthered my acceptance of improvisational work to act as a catalyst in my engagement to the raw (sometimes unperfected) material. These summers abroad gave me the courage to try new things, learn my weaknesses, acknowledge my strengths, and strive to produce material in the present moment.



## Dancing in a Strange Land (Na-sseon-ttang-e-seou-ui Chum)

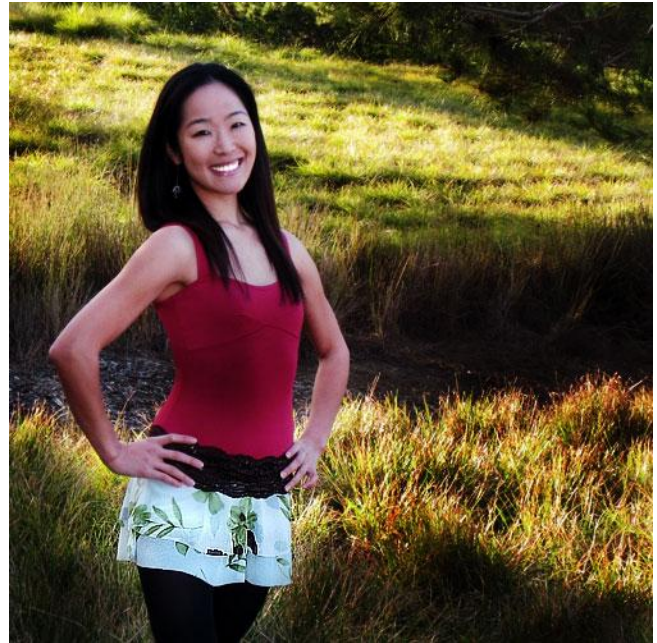
*Dance may have universal appeal, but **taking** dance in California can be very different than studying it in Korea*

*by Ahn Na Kang*

Life in a foreign country gives me the amazing opportunity to learn about other cultures, and make myself a stronger person. It grants me the benefit of experiencing new things that I otherwise would not. Though it may seem like an exciting prospect, living in an exciting new world, it is not without its share of challenges. I chose to write about my experiences here in California as a foreign dance student to inform my fellow dancers how I feel, and how I perceive the culture here.

In 2005, I came to the United States from South Korea originally hoping to learn English. I went to school to further my education, while maintaining dance as a hobby. But after two years, I decided to make dance a priority again by taking a couple dance classes at a local studio. It was very challenging to start dancing again after having a three year hiatus. But I was determined to pursue a future in dance. Unfortunately, I did not yet realize the difficult road that I had ahead of me.

First and foremost, I have noticed that dance is very language intensive, almost like an entirely new language. I remember the first time I started to learn English. For example, I felt very uncomfortable and clumsy, like a newborn baby learning to walk. When I decided to be a dance major, I second-guessed myself. I wondered if the language difference between the United States and South Korea would be too much of a problem for me to overcome. I assumed that since I was studying as a dance major, the fact that I barely spoke any English would not matter. As a dance student, I guessed that my school life would not be hard compared to other foreign students who were majoring in science, politics, business, or other academic areas. I thought those students had to spend more individual time studying in their academic area, whereas dancers spent their time practicing dance. I was quick to discover



*Ahn Na Kang*

however that the dance world here is complex and deep-rooted. People in the United States analyze dance to a great extent. They are active in questioning and presenting their ideas, while young people in South Korea are generally passive, and pay attention to professors as a form of respect. This complex situation between language and culture presented me with confusion. There were no special textbooks for me to reference, and I had a difficult time finding the exact meanings of conversations about dance and its culture. It was not because I could not understand the words being spoken; I could find the exact meanings in a dictionary.

My problem was that I did not understand the concepts and innuendos of American culture behind the conversations. I found day-to-day situations difficult for me to participate in because of the difference in culture and life between South Korea and the United States. Most of time, I withdrew from the conversations. I struggled to express my feelings and thoughts in

dance, and had trouble speaking a foreign language. As a consequence, I noticed myself being reserved instead of being open in certain situations, which is a contrast to my normal personality. I learned a significant lesson about how much a person's personality can be affected or changed by an unfamiliar environment.

In South Korea young people respect the elderly very much, and as a consequence it is common to have a large generation gap between the elderly and the youth. Most of the time, people are usually self-taught and find their way through their own problems rather than going to professors or others to ask for help. In South Korea the dance culture is also different. When Korean dance teachers coach their students, they tend to address the group rather than individuals. Specifically, Korean teachers emphasize being one and look for perfection in a group. In the United States, people emphasize the individual characteristics primarily, rather than seeing a dance piece as whole. In South Korea, I notice teachers encouraging dancers to be aware of the others in order for the piece to become unified. In the United States however, many teachers strongly encourage their students to discover themselves by expressing their feelings more. It made me wonder whether some pieces here were created with specific individual dancers already in mind, instead of being created for a group dynamic.

The universities in South Korea are much more specified in their areas of instruction. They are simply divided by ballet, modern, and traditional Korean dance. It is not necessary to learn other types of dance that people are not primarily majoring in. In fact, most South Koreans start learning only one specific type of dance when they are very young. It is for this reason that dancers develop a prejudice in their special area versus another. However, here at University of California, Irvine, dancers tend to

absorb multiple forms of dance into their own personal styles.

I felt I was much further behind other people when I first entered UCI. I had no experience in jazz, modern, or improvisation, only experience in ballet. It was an uncomfortable experience initially trying to move in a way that I had no previous instruction in. But the experience of being forced outside my comfort zone in so many different ways ultimately had a profound effect on my life. I learned to see and express myself through dance. Understanding how to truly express myself through dance helped me feel more connected to American culture.

Understanding culture is more difficult than understanding a foreign language. It makes me appreciate what I have been given. This is because I discovered how important an education can be. A good school guides me to a bigger world culturally, socially, and in many more aspects of life. It is not about just having an advanced dance technique or becoming a better dancer, but it is about being free like a bird flying in the air on a nice sunny day. I am finding that embracing this philosophy in dance can bring both cultures together and ultimately bring to me the essence of what dance is all about. It does not matter what types of dance I practice, whether it's ballet, modern, jazz, or any other types of dance. If I could give someone who wants to study abroad advice, I would like to say that it is of utmost important to try to understand and respect the culture behind dance. This is because it gives that person such a great opportunity to see and learn in various ways. I believe it will give them a wider view of themselves and the world as well. My hope is that I can continue to learn and grow as much as I can before I have to leave UCI. I want to get as much as I possibly can out of this amazing experience that I have had through dancing in the United States.

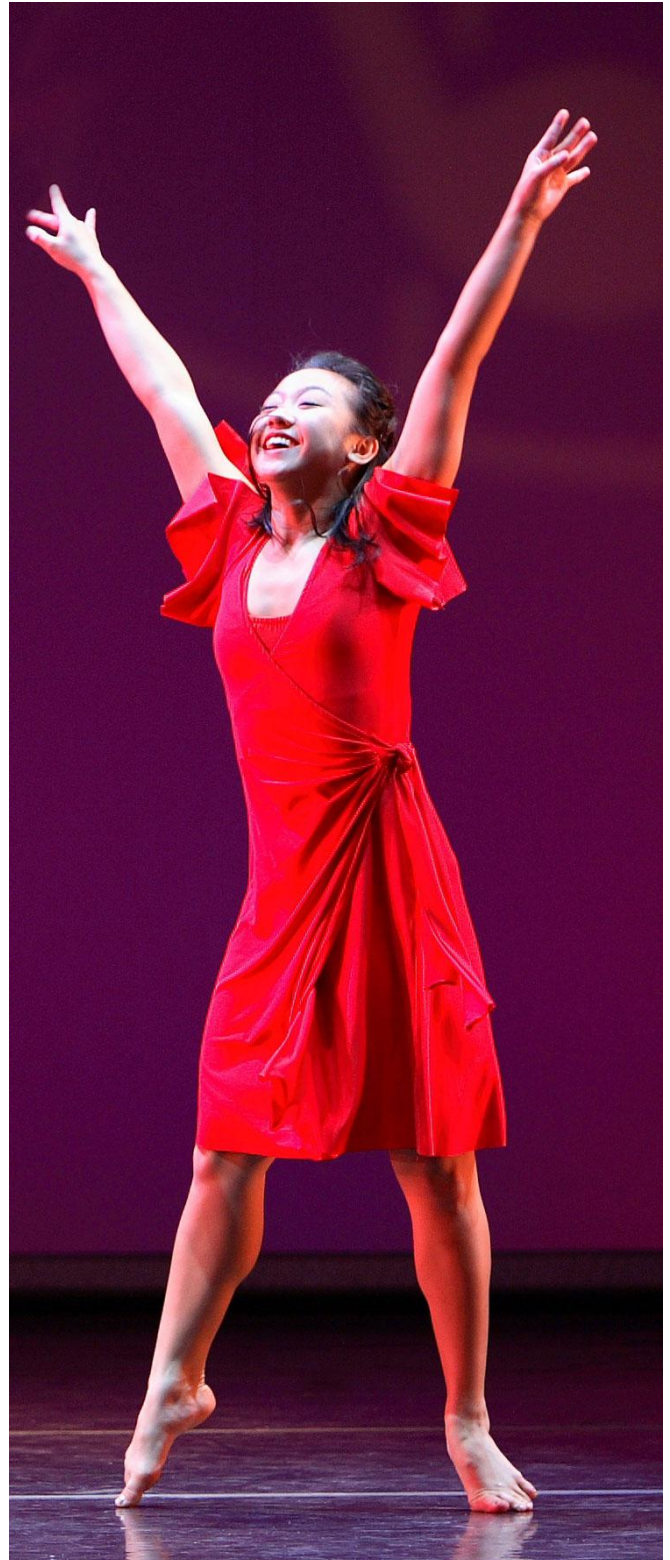
## Recent Alumni Spotlight: Ching Ching Wong

by Rachel I. Berman

In June 2010 Ching Ching Wong graduated from UCI with a BFA in Dance Performance. She moved to Portland and did a month long summer workshop with Northwest Dance Project. In August 2010 she was offered a contract with NWDP as company member. Since August she has been performing and teaching at NWDP's studio in Portland. As outsiders we might imagine that these opportunities come her way by magic. Perhaps she is just someone who walks in the light and things happen for her. I am not going to say this isn't true; those who meet Ching Ching know of her bright and exuberant power. I have often looked at her experience and thought she is incredibly lucky, and she is, but I am most impressed by the way she seeks and continues to seek opportunity.

Ching began her audition search for post-graduation opportunities in the fall of her senior year. I remember her sitting outside Cyber-A Café looking at a daunting list of companies in San Francisco, Portland, Chicago, New York, among others. I asked her about her preparation and she responded, "I really want to be in a company." I was impressed she could articulate this so simply and so well. Dancers often get into a pattern of deflecting their ambitions of professional work because of the attitudes and judgments around obtaining a job in dance. Many think they aren't good enough, or that others think they aren't good enough, or they will be judged as dreaming an impossible dream that will leave them broke and disappointed. By this point in her senior year she was able to say, "Yes, I want company work" and "Yes, I am willing to do the work to get there."

In addition to knowing she wanted to be in a company, Ching Ching had ruled out one location: Southern California. She grew up in the area, and her experience in dance had been extremely insular in terms of distance from home and style. I was surprised to learn that she had never attended a summer intensive in ballet or modern work, and her workshop experience was limited to dance conventions and competitions in



*Ching Ching Wong in Donald McKayle's "Syncopated Gambol."*  
Photo by Rose Eichenbaum



the commercial Southern California type of contemporary dance. She had a lot of experience in that vein and appreciated it, but she felt she wanted something else and wanted to *be* somewhere else. She felt that UCI had provided her with many glimpses into different genres of dance she could pursue, and she found herself attracted and challenged by contemporary work that is informed by ballet. She did not consider herself a ballet dancer, but appreciated her training in it and found that in contemporary ballet she could use different aspects of her training to find a point of entrance into the work.

Her first workshop was actually with Northwest Dance Project in January before her last winter quarter. Ching Ching describes this as one of the most exciting experiences she's had: "It really opened my eyes, and I saw how much I loved being in the process of creating new work." This appetite for new creations made Ching Ching the perfect candidate for Northwest Dance Project, which brings in choreographers from all over the world to create pieces for the company. After the weeklong stay in Portland, Northwest Dance Project offered her an apprenticeship position that would begin in March. She couldn't take it because she was determined to graduate in the spring, but the connection had been made, and she was encouraged that they were interested as she was.

She continued to audition in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York. She was able to eliminate Chicago for the time being, finding that the companies she auditioned for weren't really what she wanted and that the vibe of Chicago didn't grab her enough to look for more. New York she loved. She spent a week and loved how accessible dance was, how easy the transportation was, and she was immediately hooked by the vitality of the city. She found in her New York auditions that she would sometimes feel unprepared to audition for a particular style she hadn't trained in, such as Paul Taylor's work; but she found herself drawing on her confidence that all her knowledge and training could help her think of it as just movement, something she does very well. In San Francisco she got a gig with ODC, dancing with the company in a non-paid

position in September following her graduation. At the time, this seemed like a great starting point, from which she could meet more dancers, choreographers, teachers, and learn more about where she could go from there. That's what she planned to do until she returned to Portland for a work exchange and the summer intensive.

Her round-two trip to Portland began with Ching Ching feeling a bit like Cinderella, before she met her Fairy Godmother and Prince:

It was hard. I felt like the underdog – here's the company doing what they do, and I was under the beck and call of the directors. I would wash vases with mold and magic erase the white Marley floor. At the gala I worked for 10 hours, setting up stage, actually working as the waiter during the gala show, pouring wine and serving food. I had to stand the entire performance, because there were only seats for audience members.

Even though her work exchange turned out to be extremely difficult, she still found interest and inspiration watching one of the performers in particular. Andrea Parson, who recently received a Princess Grace Award for her outstanding performance as a dancer with NWDP, helped Ching Ching get through those long hours. Ching admired her detail, focus, performance and work ethic and thought of her as someone she could learn a lot from by just watching.

The dancing she was doing during the work exchange period put her in a difficult position as well:

I was taking a morning workshop with James Canfield. It was tortuous. James Canfield didn't look at me once, maybe because I don't have an aesthetically standard body. I am not a slender long-legged ballet type. The range of dancers had ages 12-25 so there were a lot of younger kids and discipline was the theme...I was slowly quieting that voice that said you are incapable of doing this



dance thing. He teaches the class and expects you to do his class and not your own, so I was fighting that idea of wanting to take care of my body and self-manage

It was a difficult place for her to be in, having just graduated college where her professors were treating her as a future professional dancer, and her training was geared toward that. She was taught that self-management and adjustment were things that mature dancers do, and here she was in a class that didn't seem to allow for that. She found it interesting to have these conversations with herself, adjusting how she was going to be able to take this class but still be herself: "I felt that as an adult I should not be belittled and yelled at, but his focus on detail could be useful...and being present is always important, something that is hard when you're in school."

Finally, the NWDP intensive began and she could retire her magic erasing and really dance. James Canfield was still there as a part of the Artistic Director workshop portion of the intensive. He taught a workshop and asked the dancers to improvise: "I was so excited to dance, so excited to move, I just busted it out. I guess a little bit of me wanted to prove to him I could dance." She made him see her in this context, finding she did have the skills to be noticed. During the intensive she worked with another artistic director whose words stuck with her—Robert Moses, of Robert Moses' Kin in San Francisco. He said, "You need to love where you live. If you aren't dancing, all you come home to is yourself and the city you live in." After experiencing this during her first layoff period

she finds his words even more poignant: "If you don't like where you live you may not even be happy with yourself. It can really affect your experience."

The second part of the intensive was working with two choreographers to create two new pieces. "I love being able to create with a choreographer right there, to have them give you movement as they try to mold it. It's really exciting for me. Not everyone got used, and not everyone got to be in the sections, and I felt really fortunate that I got to work with them a lot." After impressing more of the choreographers who she worked with in the intensive, the directors finally got a clue and offered her a position. "I brought two suitcases with me to Portland and started working on August 1<sup>st</sup>."

Ching Ching has a 25-week contract and is also teaching at the studio on their day off, which she says is enough for her right now with the pay manageable for her life in Portland. Ching Ching is finding herself loving where she lives, and she loves the company work. She is learning about herself in a new place and finding herself focused more than ever on her continual pursuit of deeper artistry. She feels that she has the space to really explore now. Of course she misses the large community of dancers at UCI, spending her time with only nine other dancers, six days a week, and practically living in the studio. But she describes herself as a homebody and finds that it suits her well. Northwest Dance Project has quickly become a home for her. She is lucky to have found a city she loves being in so much, especially after all the talk about location being so crucial. I look forward to visiting again; it will be exciting to see where it all leads her.

## A Legend at UCI: Israel 'El' Gabriel

*The retirement of Professor Gabriel this year left a large “El-shaped” hole in the department where he taught, mentored, sang, and reminded each dance major that “young generation” dancers need to pli   more. Below, El at home (right) with partner Arie Fleischer.*

*by Stephanie Deere*

“Make sure you know! Even if you don’t know, make sure you know! That is the secret.” This was the much-anticipated response to a question I asked the all-knowing, all-inspiring Israel “El” Gabriel one morning while seated across from him and his beloved partner, Arie Fleischer in their Los Angeles home. With a box of girl-scout cookies on a tray between us, I had asked El what every dancer should know before they venture out into the real, competitive world of dance. He smiled with enthusiasm, finished his cookie, and delivered the above response, followed by his cheerful laughter and contagious smile.

As a senior in the dance department, preparing to leave UCI, I had realized over the past several months how much El had contributed to the progress I had made while attending this school. I had also had the unfortunate realization that there are many dancers here at UCI who were never able to have El as a teacher—not to mention the many students entering in the future who will know very little if anything about him, since he retired last year after a serious car accident. The UCI dance department and the students in it have been shaped and molded by El. I thought that each and every student in the department should still be able to benefit from his great wisdom, even if they could no longer experience his great teaching. Therefore, I went to interview him.

El was put into a ballet class by his grandparents at age eight in the Philippines where he was born. In his teens, the school he attended sent four students, two boys, and two girls, to America to study. El came to New York to study dance, and from there his career took off. This is where he met the famous choreographer Eugene Loring, who began the UCI dance department in 1965 and under whose direction El began to teach at the young age of 18. El danced for Loring and



*El at home (right) with partner Arie Fleischer*

other choreographers, then left UCI to travel to many places in the world. He danced for the Bat-Dor Dance Company in Israel and became the assistant artistic director. There he met Arie, who traveled back to America with El in 1973 when El returned to UCI. While El loved to dance, his true passion was always teaching.

Mr. Loring passed away in 1982 from brain cancer, and while the department has been headed by a legacy of different chairs, Loring left El to fulfill his legacy at UCI. El worked at keeping the program the way Mr. Loring had intended, he says, unifying the different dance forms, creating a democratic environment for the many great teachers. He also inspired students and tried to provide them with the best training possible, choreographing himself and helping them to create great choreographies that would demonstrate UCI’s success as a department. El said, “Mr. Loring really trusted me and he had much knowledge.” El wanted to ensure that the department continued as Loring would have wanted.

Over time, despite El’s strongest efforts, the dance program at UCI changed a great deal.

El and Arie both spoke of a strong unity that used to exist within the department. "Each teacher used to go to every final—not only to their own finals. It was more fair that way." El said that even substitute teachers and graduate students who had helped teach were present at the finals and would help determine the grade each student deserved. He said that it was much more time-consuming, but it was better for the students. Now, the department appears to be divided into three schools: ballet, modern, and jazz, and crossover seems to be limited. While budget cuts can surely be blamed for teachers not being able to dedicate so much of their time to student-grading, it made me wonder if there were other factors involved in this separation as well. When El left a few years ago, did the possibility of a strong unity of the dance department leave with him? Did the means for open communication among all of our great dance professors suddenly disappear?

I asked El when the best time for UCI was, and he said it was in the very beginning when Mr. Loring was in charge. Mr. Loring's goal was to make each student a "great dancer, great teacher, and a great administrator," according to El. Arie said that it was always El's goal to adhere to what Mr. Loring would have wanted for the program. El fought extremely hard to keep the program unified, and to keep the level of instruction students received at its highest. He worked hard to bring Molly Lynch to the program and to ensure that each teacher was getting their needs met, while fulfilling the needs of the students in the department. El strove to push each dancer to the best of their abilities. Alyssa Junius, a fourth-year dance major said, "He pushed me in ballet, even though I'm a jazz dancer. In his class I was to be "Alissa Scova" my ballerina Alias. With humor, he was able to break down my negative attitude towards ballet and now I appreciate him and ballet".

The first day I saw El was at placement auditions, during Welcome Week, my first quarter here at UCI. I had entered the university as a biology major and had come to school already knowing I would do everything I could do to become a dance major. I had just moved

into the dorms, felt home-sick and completely overwhelmed, but I went to the dance placement auditions. Upon entering the audition room, I saw a panel of teachers, and at the end of the table, standing, was an older Filipino man who told us where to stand. He stared at us without forgiveness and counted us in to perform the first combination of the day, which was a ballet combination. I wondered what I had just gotten myself into. After that long day of auditioning, I went home exhausted, but confident that I had been successful in making level 2, which would allow me to enter the dance major program. The first week of school, I went to the dance office to see what classes I would be taking, and El had informed me that I made level 2. I was so afraid of this man and yet so happy that I had been able to enter the program. I admit I was a bit disappointed I had not made a higher level, but little did I know of the caliber of technique that was expected of UCI dancers.

After a couple weeks of classes, I had begun to settle into my routine and understood what was expected, and El walked in to teach my Ballet 2 class. I froze. Then I prayed. What would be expected of us? Would he yell at me? Would I embarrass myself? How would I be able to survive an hour and fifty minutes of this anxiety? And yet, this had been the best class I had had yet at UCI. I left that first class from El knowing that dance was what I was committed to, and he gave me a yearning and a need to improve. He challenged us, pushed many of us harder than we had ever been pushed before, yet he did so with love and humor. We understood that he merely wanted us to take class seriously, take our art form seriously, and fight to improve. His ballet barre was a non-stop, continuous series which we were expected to memorize, probably around thirty minutes long. He expected us to know the combinations and pay attention so that we would not commit foolish mistakes.

El would have us repeat exercises many times, as many times as needed until we were together as a group and knew the exercise well. We were moving the entire class and there was never any downtime or breaks. However, he pushed us in this way in an endearing manner. He

would often say things like, “You are young, make sure you eat! Eat a pound of bacon!” If someone was absent, he would say, “Uh oh. Did she get married?” El was an extremely hard teacher, but genuinely cared about his students and loved to make them laugh. One day, I was sitting at his desk getting class codes, and he asked me about all of the rings I was wearing. He said, “You have so many rings. One from each of your boyfriends?” I laughed so hard. I will never forget all of the great things El said to me that made me laugh or that inspired me.

El told me during my recent interview with him that each dancer should take advantage of all of the tools given to us at UCI. We should never be lazy, and we should always try our best. No matter how difficult something is, at least try. Jen Hunter, a fourth-year graduating dance major said, “El has all the good qualities of a teacher. He understands what it means to dance, he motivates you to try your hardest, and he is extremely funny.” He told me we should be “learning a lot of technique,” and again, “make sure you know, even if you don’t.”

### **What UCI Dance Majors say about El**

Hope Bataclan – A fourth-year dance major. I enjoyed, and now miss, the presence of El. Ballet class with him was tough at times, but I definitely appreciated it. When I was absent for class, my friends told me that while he was calling roll, he would say “Hope? Hope?! There is no hope...” And when I would come to class, and Jonah Aki was not there, he would say, “Hope, where is your boyfriend?!” I wonder if part of the reason why I haven’t taken ballet for the past 2 years was because I did not enjoy it as much since El hasn’t been teaching. I miss you El!!!!!!

Megan Higaki – A fourth-year dance major. El was amaaaaaazing! Not only did he help me to realize that I wanted to become a dance major he also knew every single dance major’s name! My sophomore year I was sitting in the second to last row of a dark

El was a teacher who changed the way I felt about dance and who greatly influenced the dancer I have become. His presence is still with us every day, and I hope that it remains that way forever at UCI. El’s goal was to be the best teacher for us and to help us in our dancing careers in any way he could. Arie said that, “El always saw the good in everyone—he never had any enemies and he never got involved in any politics. After El’s accident, when he first woke up in the ICU unit, the first thing he said was ‘Call Karen! Ask her my schedule! When am I teaching again?’”

While many dancers attending UCI will never have the opportunity to have El as a teacher, my hope is that they can learn from his impact on this program and they will know that he is one of the main reasons we had such a strong program to begin with. El said that his goal for the program is that “the school should be recognized by other companies, especially our technique!”

Claire Trevor theater watching a dress rehearsal and I hear, “Is that Megan?” How did he know?! I miss you El and all your theories on our generation and your self-narrated ballet combinations!

Maddy Lamond – A fourth-year dance major. Can we please all discuss El’s amazing fashion sense? I can honestly say no one pulls off a UCI Baseball jersey and a furry Kangol hat quite like Mr. El Gabriel. I also will never forget his oh-so-famous mantra, “If you don’t like to be touched CHANGE YOUR MAJORRRRRRR!!!!” He truly is a man of style, and class, with an excellent sense of humor.

Kellie St. Pierre – A fourth-year dance major. El is truly the spirit of the dance department. He knew pretty much every student by name and

face and every time I would walk into the dance department he would say "Mademoiselle St. Pierre...you trouble." During class we would always be able to count on him to ask "You have boyfriend? Is he rich?" and he will never fail to count us in with FIIIIIVVVVVVEEEEEEE. I love you EL!!!!

Katy Felsinger – A third-year dance major. El is the only person besides my mom to call me by my full name. He would yell out every time he called roll in Ballet II: Kathryn Yvonneeeeeee! I will never forget his bucket hats and crocs, or how many times he asked us all if we had a boyfriend...and if he was rich.

Monet Thornburg – A third-year dance major I will never forget being placed alphabetically throughout the room for our ballet final and always ending up right in front of El because of my late last name. He'd always give me an encouraging wink, but about half way through barre he'd fall asleep by the piano. Then we came to the center and did 8 battements in each direction on pointe and finally get our name sung to us as we went one at a time across the floor. He really lightened the mood of those tedious finals!

Randall Smith – A first-year graduate student who completed his undergraduate BA at UCI. The first thing El would do is come in put his stuff down, open the music box and put his long barre CD in. He then would look around, scream excessively because the majority of the students were not dressed properly or ready for class. He would always say, "This generation does not believe in tights anymore..." He would then turn music on and with his deep voice say "FIVEEEEE!" He would go through the whole combination repeating every technical aspect of his warm up. Every now and then you could catch him on the side, usually near a barre that was connected to the wall, doing the warm up. And just when you thought he wasn't paying attention to you, he would come around and correct your posture, or tell you to pull up your "poo-poo muscle" or tap your stomach to make sure your core was engaged. He was always attentive of everyone no matter their expertise.

Justin Keats – A fourth-year dance major. He treated me like his grandson. Every time I came into the office he would tell me I was too skinny and force feed me. :) What was even better was in partnering when I was the only boy he would bring me chocolate every class. And not just small pieces but whole tins full of delicious sweets. Besides taking care of my weight he also took care of me getting on the right track class-wise and sharing his success secrets. My favorite story was him explaining how he was a Dole Pineapple model and how he is the reason super models walk to music in runway shows.

Cristina Lobue – A UCI dance alumni. If you didn't know the way he was in class, he was scary! I quickly caught on to his act and was able to recognize just how much he cares about all of his students. And it was so great to see all the freshmen freaking out because they bought into his act! What an incredible teacher; I have so much respect for him. His classes were probably some of my absolute best dance days! Oh, what I wouldn't give to take class from him again!

Jessica Hambright – A fourth-year dance major. EL was never afraid to push you hard....jumps GALORE, pushing your leg up higher, asking you about your boyfriend because of the ring on your finger, telling you your foot was deformed. He made us laugh while making us realize that we needed to work harder. He referred to me as "The Problem" (which I laughed at every time) when I came to sign up for classes, but always made sure I was taking what I needed, pushing for more classes. He made us better, all the time. And then gave us pretzel sticks.

Heather Fitzgerald – A UCI dance alumna. "Yeu yeung geineration with the doo doo doo (headphones in ears) and the doo doo doo (typing on a computer) just walken in de moonliiiiight."

Nicole Paralee Jackson – A fourth-year dance major.

The most remarkable thing about El was that year after year he never lost his passion for the students. He was a rare gem because he knew and truly cared about every single dancer that walked through his studio doors. No one really invested in us the way that El did, and this is what I miss

the most. On top of all this he had such a wonderful sense of humor and easily made you laugh as hard as he made you work. I remember this high-pitched shriek he used to make, “EEEEKKK!” when we messed up the combo. I called this his pterodactyl screech, because it scared the crap out of me every time. And how could you forget his infamous barre warm-up? I’ll never forget the day I did it on pointe. By the end of class my legs were so wobbly I could barely

walk. I remember hobbling to the Norte bus thinking, “I’m not going to make it to the buses, I’m just going to have to sleep here tonight.” To this day no one has ever worked me that hard before. EL, you are truly one of a kind, and leave a tremendous legacy to the UC Irvine dance department. I feel so grateful to have known you, and thank you for all the beautiful memories! Love you EL!



*El with students*

*From left: Julia Cost, Renae Pryjmak, Katy Felsinger, Politeia Le, El Gabriel, Arie Fleischer, Natalie Johnson, Rachel Berman, Kellie St. Pierre*



## The Hidden Minority Group: Out-of-State Dance Majors

*There are four times as many out-of-state undergraduates in the dance department as in the general UCI student population. Are we ahead of the curve?*

by Alysha Shroff

When I came into UC Irvine's dance program over three years ago, I was unaware that I would be in a minority group. In this case it wasn't because of ethnicity or gender but because of where I lived before UC Irvine, that is, out-of-state. Back in Seattle, I had spent a difficult senior year at school looking into colleges and universities, taking tests, filling out applications, and writing personal statements like there was no end. I thought I was just one student like many others, and that once I finally decided on which school to attend, everyone would be just like me, coming from far away to a foreign place to begin a new venture. But this was not the case—of the 22,000 people that attend UCI, the number who come from out-of-state is so small they could all fit into a regular sized lecture hall. This was something I learned very quickly as I was bombarded with the typical questions from the students I first met here. First of all, my major was dance, pretty rare. Then, I was from Seattle? It was at the least unusual. For a while, I felt like the only one of my kind from outside California. But after getting to know my fellow dancers, I realized that a handful were also from out-of-state. In a department as small as ours, I found this really unique.

At the start of my final year at UCI, I was really quite curious about the out-of-state phenomenon and wanted to research it. What are the motivations for students to come to a school where they are a bit of an oddity? Perhaps they also didn't realize they'd be one of few, or it just didn't matter. The first thing I needed to do was to take a look at some numbers. Among 172 dance majors, 14 come from out of state, which equals 8%. In the School of the Arts: of 926 students, 44 are non-residents, or about 5%. In 2010, only 2% of the entire UCI student body (22,226 students) were not from California (Figure 1). This shows that the dance department

has about 4 times more out-of-state students than the university has.

The simplest reason I could think of as to why UC Irvine's dance department attracts so many more out-of-state students than other departments is because there aren't so many well-known and respected college dance programs, compared to other areas of study. The pool of schools that have nationally-recognized dance programs is smaller, and therefore the chance of someone attending UCI from another state is more likely. In my case, I had never heard of the university, let alone the city, until a dance teacher of mine mentioned it to me one day. I found by talking to my fellow out-of-state dance majors that they also heard about the school through word of mouth, from dancers in their social circle or a former dance teacher. A smaller percentage of people learned about UCI's dance program during dance intensives they attended on or near UCI's campus. Students who had been here became familiar with the dance facilities and the campus, so added it to their list of colleges to apply to. These were the primary ways non-California residents came to learn about UCI, unlike the California state residents, who were naturally familiar with the UCs and Cal States.

**Out-of-State Students by School**

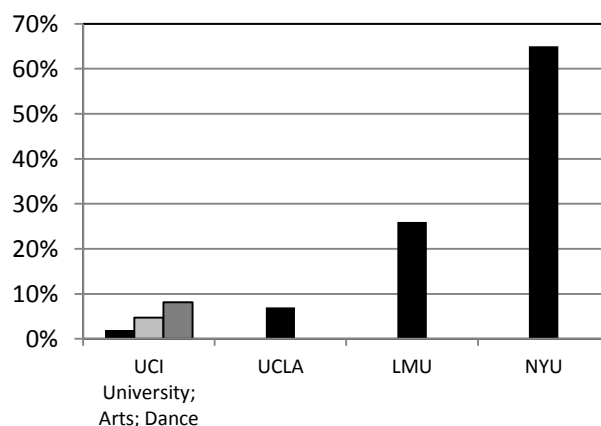


Figure 1

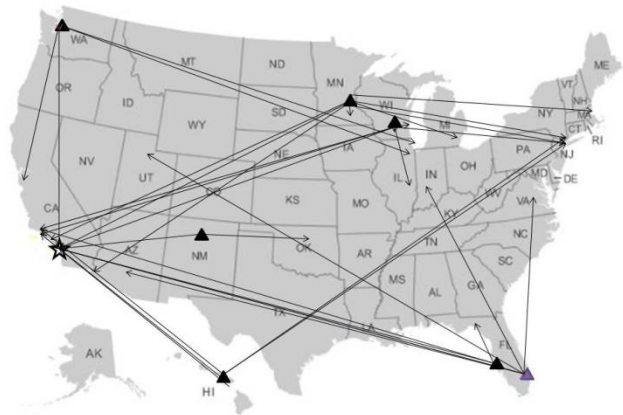


Figure 2

In my interviews with several students, I found that other schools they had applied to most commonly were New York University, Juilliard, Loyola Marymount University and the University of Arizona. Figure 2 shows a map of the United States and, of the students I interviewed, most of the schools they applied to. For the most part, schools in New York or California were most popular, very understandable since these are two of the most popular dance areas in the country. One fact I found very interesting is that not only did practically every student apply to at least one college in their home state, but more often than not, one of these schools was the student's second choice, next to UCI. The same applied to me: had I not attended UC Irvine, my plan was to stay near home and attend the University of Washington. I found this fact interesting and wanted to delve into it a bit deeper.

After leaving my hometown of Seattle, I often wondered if I was sacrificing the relationships I'd built after so many years with my fellow dance students, teachers, choreographers and the like, to travel to a city where I knew no one. As we are told, "In the dance world, it's a lot about who you know." In leaving the place where I felt I had the most connections and was most comfortable, I worried that maybe I was making the wrong choice. Luckily, I have been able to make the most of my time in California, but the thought often lingered, and so I wondered if others felt that way too. The consensus from students I spoke with was that though there were people or jobs near home

available, it probably would not have been as beneficial as attending a school with a very strong dance curriculum like UCI. Another factor was the chance for independence. Leaving home was an important step for them, and what better place to do so than in Southern California? Traveling away from home, for many students, not just dance majors, is often a high priority.

After looking at the responses I gathered, which was only information on a piece of paper, I took a step back and tried to see where all these people came from. I noticed that most places people came from were not necessarily popular destinations for dance; the opportunities "at home" were probably more limited. It makes sense, then, that so many dancers in California would want to attend a school such as UC Irvine: it is academically recognized with a prestigious department housing many well-known faculty members, and it is located in an area with a lot of dance opportunities.

A hot topic of conversation in regard to any student who attends a college outside of their home state is out-of-state tuition. It's immensely higher than the tuition that residents pay, no matter where you go. This of course has a great deal to do with decision-making for any student who is about to enter college. I refrained from asking my interviewees questions about tuition, as I felt there may be some personal information they would not want revealed. From having spoken with people about this before, I know there are options that are financially unavailable for many students, while others have more resources. UC Irvine's out-of-state tuition falls right in the middle of the other schools my fellow

Out-of-State Tuition by School

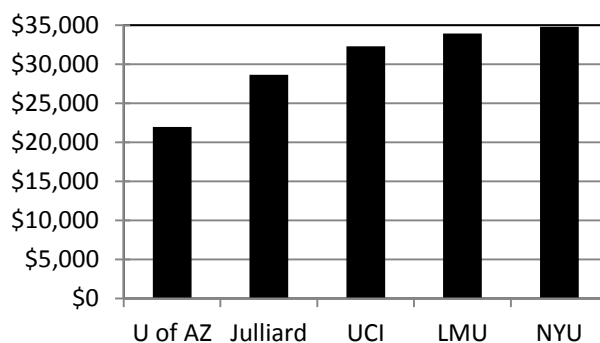


Figure 3

out-of-staters considered—\$32,281 compared to NYU at \$34,780; Juilliard, \$28,640; LMU, \$33,901 and University of Arizona, \$21,949 (Figure 3). Taking advantage of financial aid and scholarships that UC Irvine has to offer is an excellent way of decreasing this hardship. About 68% of students on campus receive funding who apply for it in either form.

What's next for out-of-state students, at least those in the UC-system? For most universities, the UCs included, increasing the number of out-of-state (and international) students is a growing priority each year, according to a recent article in the *LA Times*. The UCs have traditionally fallen short in this area; the percentages have shown little to no increase over the years. Unlike most campuses whose typical undergraduate out-of-state rate is about 16%, the UC's collectively are only about 6% - and that's across nine different campuses. Within the next few years, the UC system would like to increase this number to about 10%, but it is still modest compared to other college campuses. If the past is any indication, UCI's dance program

will continue to draw in a larger crowd of out-of-state students compared to the rest of the campus.

As college becomes more attractive to students looking to increase their career opportunities, making the right decision of where to obtain a degree is important. Seeking out as many schools as possible that fit a set of criteria will increase the chances of attending a suitable college or university. Speaking with friends, family and others in one's social circle may give insight to schools that were not considered before. As a dancer, it is important to weigh all options, as the technique and theoretical training you will receive is vital to furthering your career. Also, where a college is located may have benefits that other schools can't offer, such as more performance, auditions or choreographic opportunities. UC Irvine is a school that has had a highly regarded dance program for years, and still continues to, has a prestigious faculty, and is in a location appealing to people from all over the country. Hopefully over time, the program can attract even more out-of-state students in hopes of increasing its sense of diversity and bringing together new talents from around the country.

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## Learning to partner at UCI

*Dancing with another person takes skill—Will **you** know how when you graduate?*

*by Brian Gonzalez*

Most people dance their whole lives and are hardly ever taught how to partner. It's often not until college that dancers are even exposed to it; others don't even get to partner until auditions or pre-professional programs. One of the most important skills a professional dancer should have is to know how to partner. It's essential no matter what type of dance aspirations one may have.

When most people think of partnering in dance they think of *pas de deux*, which is ballet partnering, but it comes in many other different forms. There is some sort of partnering or another in every style of dance, and it's not really emphasized or taught as much as it should be. There is a partnering class offered here at UCI, for instance, but only BFA students are required to take it, and it's only offered once a year, often conflicting with major technique classes, so not everyone is able to take it. The class is called "Partnering," when it should really be called Pas de Deux because ballet partnering is all that is really taught. Pas de deux is not the only form of partnering; yes it teaches the boy to catch, lift and balance the girl, and the girl to rely on him, but there is so much more to learn.

Knowing how to dance with another person requires skill. For one, not many people are use to dancing with someone else. They are used to dancing alone, and when asked to partner they don't know what to do and can put themselves and their partner in danger. You need to learn how to make eye contact with your partner and build a relationship; it's all about absolute trust in every way, including feeling comfortable talking to them if something isn't feeling right to make sure you both feel safe. It requires knowing how to stay lifted and not give your partner dead weight, getting timing correct, not resisting movement but letting it flow, to have equal give and take, and to allow a partner's movement to connect with yours. It requires mastering human touch. When performing with a partner, it's not two different people on stage



*Alysha Shroff (left) and Brian Gonzalez*

dancing, it's one. Partners need to learn how to let go of their ego, and shift the focus from themselves to the partnership as a whole.

It's not only important for a guy to have experience in partnering but also for the girl. As easy as it is for a guy to hurt a girl, a girl can hurt him equally as badly. Dancing for Disneyland gives me the opportunity to dance with people from many different dance backgrounds. There, I notice right away when people have had partnering training or experience. When partnering with a girl at work I notice if they are allowing me to lead, if they trust me, if they lift their own weight or know how to help me with lifts. I have partnered girls who have hurt my shoulder and back because they don't know how to partner, and I hear the same complaints from other people who have worked with them. Not only am I able to tell if a dancer has had any partnering experience, she is also able to tell if I have. Girls need to know how to lift and jump before their partner lifts them, they need to learn how to hold their core and not let it go. Letting go gives their partner dead weight, and they can very easily hurt themselves. Lifts are a lot easier when both partners are prepared for the movement. Girls need to imagine they are performing alone, because the men are there to support them, not take over full responsibility.

Ideally there should be partnering class for every style but we all know that with the budget crisis more classes will probably not be added. However, something that can be done to start addressing the problem of having only one course is maybe to offer partnering on a day and time that doesn't overlap with the main technique classes. Also, partnering could be taught in other classes. Every technique class is offered at least three times a week for two hours a day. It would be very easy to dedicate one class a week, or part of a class, to partnering in that style. Doing so would give students an added bonus.

If the budget allows, I think the best class to add is contact improvisation. It's one of the most important tools in developing partnering. Contact improvisation is a dance technique in which two or more moving bodies are in physical contact, giving and taking weight. The contact points provide the starting point for exploration through free play. To do contact improv everyone must be comfortable with body contact and learn to find a flow with their partner and learn to react and respond to one another. The class teaches the fundamentals in partnering. It teaches you how to become a base when someone trusts you with their weight and how to know when to trust them. It makes you keep a watchful eye and always be prepared for any situation; it also helps you adapt to variety of partnering styles and body types. You learn how to catch and be caught, lift and be lifted. Contact improvisation is often referred to as a playground of partnering development and is one of the first steps to learning to partner.

When I started dancing I began with salsa. Social dancing teaches you a lot about partnering. It teaches a boy not only how to lead but how to be gentle, respect their partner, know how to control another body while still trying to control theirs. It also teaches how to work with another person and maintain a connection. Most importantly, it teaches you how to dance with someone else in close contact while still making your own decisions, choosing your own timing, and dancing independently. It's not the steps that are difficult, it's the interaction with your partner that is. When you're working that closely with someone you don't have the ability to step back

and see how it looks or see where to place your hand or foot or how to do certain things—you just have to feel it and know if it's right or wrong. It teaches the girl how to let go, how to allow themselves to be led and not always be in control. The girl has to really pay attention to her connection with her partner and the details and signals her partner gives her and how to do what she is being asked to do by mere body contact.

I can apply what I have learned in social dancing to partnering in any other dance style. It has made me more aware of myself, my partner and the connection we have. If there is something wrong, it allows me to analyze the situation as to what the mistake is and how to fix it. I have the ability to let the girl know what she should do and how it should feel. Likewise, she can tell me what I'm doing wrong, or if she does not understand what I'm trying to make her do, she can allow me to try something new until I get it right and she understands. In a way, I'm learning to lead and follow at the same time. When I teach boys how to salsa, I sometimes need to lead them, allowing them to be the girl so they feel how it should feel. It gives them a better understanding of what they should do. A good partner doesn't need to verbally tell his partner what to do; he should just be able to lead a girl into doing what he wants her to do even if she has never done it before. There are many different skills one can take from social dancing and apply to partnering in other styles.

Knowing how to partner and having the proper technique gives you a chance of booking more jobs as a dancer. You can also offer better safety to your partner, ensuring a longer lasting partnering experience. If you join or audition for a company and have limits to what you are able to do, it doesn't allow you or the company to develop. Lack of proper partnering technique is what limits a dancer from being able to partner, not gender, body shape or height. Having partnering technique and developing it will further a dancer's career, making them more adaptable to a variety of roles, making them more marketable out in the dance world. So why isn't it offered more, or taken more seriously in one of the most prestigious college dance programs in the U.S.?

## The double-major as double-agent

*How does dance relate to fields outside the arts? You can count the ways.*

*by Nicole Jackson*

Although it may be difficult for an average student to imagine, a degree in dance can be highly integrated with other areas of study that exist across the campus. Many double majors soon come to realize how an education in dance is not an isolated area of study, but rather a rich culmination of cross-curriculum ideas. This paper explores the lives of dance double majors through personal interviews, to show why dancers choose to double major, and how their other major has complemented their dance education. These highly motivated students find that connecting ideas makes them more knowledgeable people and more well-rounded artists.

To be able to understand how dance is influenced by other studies, it is important to look at why dance majors decide to take up another major in the first place. Pressure from society's belief that a dance degree is not enough is easily internalized, and leads you to believe that you will need a "back-up" plan. Practicality and stability play into this mentality as well. Dancers often worry about having something to fall back on, once their performance career is over. A second year interviewee stated that "Dance isn't something that I want to solely rely on in the future; I needed something else to get me more places." I asked if she had felt influenced to pursue another degree, and she said yes, but also made a point that she still believes dance is a legitimate career to pursue on its own.

It is interesting to note, that none of the dancers interviewed came in with two majors, and most of them added their second major by the end of their second year. For students who entered UCI as non-dance majors, it was evident that they encountered many obstacles when signing up for classes, getting into a higher level class, and auditioning for shows. These complications made it clear that they were not going to be challenged, or get very far in the dance program without being a dance major.

The students admitted to UCI as dance majors had quite a different experience. While fulfilling their GE requirements, many found a new passion outside of the arts school and were inspired to major in it. Other dance majors came in with the notion that they would eventually pick up a minor or another major, but only if the subject matter was as important to them as dance. Some students trust in themselves to make it in the business and accept occasional struggling, while others want to prepare for an alternate route. In either case, once the students accepted the route of a double major their studies began to change. Suddenly their schedules were packed with 20 units of technique classes as well as lecture classes in both majors. Many areas like sociology, political science, kinesiology, and business management related to topics discussed in their dance lecture classes.

A third year dance major noted that her marketing class would give her a competitive advantage: "Being able to market yourself is about networking and promoting oneself. It's not directed towards me as a dancer but I'm taking it that way." She also noted that her management class enabled her to reflect on what kind of studio she would want to own, and what image she would promote. I asked what she would want to display on her programs or website and she said, "I want to make everybody feel like they have a chance. I don't just want to show the best [dancers] because not everybody is going to be the best."

In my field of cognitive sciences I learned enough to recognize that Nijinsky exhibited schizophrenic traits when I read about him in dance history. He was extremely anti-social and experienced a psychotic break at the exact age that males begin to show signs of schizophrenia. A fourth-year dance and sociology major, said that she also noticed correspondences in her dance history courses. "One day we were talking about *Giselle* and how the dominant class decides



what type of art gets made. It was just like Marxist theory and the means of production.” There are many ways in which dance education enriches other areas of study and vice versa, and these interviews are only a few examples.

The main reason for the shared concepts across different academic fields is that dance reflects the culture it’s made in. It is impossible to segregate dance from sociopolitical categories and the larger forces of society. These forces also play a large role in creating inspiration for an artist. In the *Physical Graffiti* concert of 2009 there was a very moving performance called “Bombies” by Julian De Guzman. Inspired by his Race and Ethnicity class, his subject was the history of the bombing of Laos. Dancers should be thinking critically and considering how the different aspects of their studies can be associated. When asked, “How do you think your double major makes you a stronger person?” one participant who studied business answered, “It’s like I get the best of both worlds. I get to be expressive and creative, while gaining the stability of the corporate world.”

As a dance double major you grow stronger through perseverance. The days are often

long and physically exhausting as well as mentally draining. As one fourth year put it, “Life is hectic as a dancer, because at the end of the day you’re tired from all the physical activity, but then you have to go home and do mental activity and dedicate yourself to studying.” But the tiring life of a double major is not without its rewards. With such a wealth of knowledge gained from both majors, the dancer develops an open view of the world, allowing them to see things from many perspectives. Each dancer’s reasons for being a double major varies, but they are predominately influenced by the need to have more options after graduation and most importantly to prepare for the end of their performing career. It was an unexpected surprise when the dancers discovered that both of their majors are not independent of one another, and they got to reap the benefits of pursuing both passions. These interviews help to give a face to the hard- working striving artists that seek fulfillment in the areas they are most passionate about. Dance influences and is influenced by the greater society, making it hard to understand why people ask the dance major, “What are you going to do with that?”

# **You're Majoring in Dance and Drama... Why?**

*by Kaira Karnad*

Throughout my time at UCI, whenever I meet new people, the common question comes up; "What's your major?" Well, I have two, both are in the performing arts, and it's not easy. Many students don't realize the difficulty in being a double major within the arts department, from scheduling required classes for both majors that are only offered once a year, to just finding a balance between two departments that sometimes don't seem to work all that well together. I've interviewed a couple of recent graduates from UCI, Nicole Christman (2010) and Esther Berman (2010), and a peer, Kathryn Endo, and also offer my own experience as a double major. The Claire Trevor School of the Arts is already one of the smallest schools at UCI, so I wanted to know what is it like to be a major in dance and drama. Why did this handful of dancer/actors or actor/dancers decide to pick not one, but two majors in the Arts, an already difficult field to break into?

## **Why did you choose a double major in dance and drama?**

For all of us, a main reason we chose to double major in dance and drama instead of just picking one was because we were interested in a career in both. Kathryn Endo, a third year student graduating a year early, said, "I feel equally divided in my passions between acting and dancing, and one alone is not enough to satisfy me artistically. It would be like using only one hand all the time when you're trying to build something." Esther, Kathryn and I all added the dance major after getting into UCI and decided to pursue the major because it was a passion we weren't willing to give up yet.

## **Is there something you feel you are getting more of in one particular department?**

All of us agreed, there is just a greater sense of community in the Dance Department compared with the Drama Department. While the Drama program is wonderful and gives great opportunities to the undergrads, it is much more

focused on the graduate program. We all felt like the Dance Department caters to the integration of graduate and undergraduate students and since it's smaller, there are more opportunities for the students to perform in productions that have a larger budget.

## **How has scheduling classes been? Have you had difficulty keeping to a schedule in order to graduate on time?**

Scheduling has been difficult for everyone. Nicole was lucky enough to graduate in four years and take a quarter off to study abroad in Paris, but that meant taking between 24 and 30 units every quarter. Esther managed to complete most of her requirements before the budget cuts really started taking a toll on offered courses. She also took two sessions of summer school and the required classes were being offered more often than once a year.

Kathryn and I both feel like we're missing out on things because of scheduling conflicts. During Spring Quarter of 2010, I was unable to take the last quarter of Dance History because the section that fit into my schedule was full, and a required drama class only offered once a year conflicted with the other section. Kathryn gave a strong example of some of the dilemmas between required classes and classes you want to take just for fun: "A perfect example of this is that in Winter Quarter Tap, Acting for Dancers and Drama 50A [Costume Design] are all classes I wanted to take and were all at the same time." Assuming Kathryn gets every class she needs this year, she will be able to graduate with both majors in June. Luckily, she has had priority registration due to the Campus-wide Honors Program and about 30 units per quarter is definitely helping her achieve this goal.

## **What are some things you like in the drama department? And in the dance department?**

A favorite of all of us are the guest artists in the technique classes in the dance department.

It's absolutely wonderful getting a new face and style to expand our dance knowledge. There are also a lot of opportunities to show your art in both departments, but the dance department definitely allows you to hone your craft in a slightly more professional setting. The drama department has a much larger range of electives from mask making to clowning to directing, while in the dance department, there isn't much variety in elective academic courses as there is on the technique side of dance.

**How do you feel about the balance between both majors?**

You need to make choices; It's what life's all about. There isn't much crossover in required courses which is the downside of picking these two particular majors, but each department is strong independently, while they collaborate really well together. As an artist and student, you need to figure out how the balance will work for you, whether it's dance-heavy one quarter and drama-heavy the next, trying to maintain as even a balance as possible.

**Would you be able to pick one of the majors between the two?**

Each of us feels like both majors are vital to our college experience. Esther said it well: "I came in as a drama major, but I think I ultimately connected more with the dance major as I went on. I met a lot of great people and took a lot of great classes through the drama major, though, so I don't know if I'd really be able to pick dance over drama, having experienced them both."

It has been a wonderful experience to be able to work with our amazing dance faculty and to meet the others who seem to be committed to the dance world as we are. They have given us, the undergrads, amazing opportunities to display our work, to work with our peers, to experience visiting artists from the professional world, and to form a community that will be cherished. At the end of this school year in June 2011, I have no doubt in my mind that I will feel the same way as Esther does after graduating from UCI. She said, "I'm really happy I was able to complete both [majors], and I think it made my college experience 100% better."

## **Make it a double: pursuing a second major while dancing**

*by Stacey Thornton*

According to the UCI Dance Department website, approximately 15% of UCI dance majors are also pursuing a degree in another subject. Dance students who choose to take on a second or “double” major do so for a variety of reasons, and it’s certainly not a decision to be made lightly given the additional commitments of time, money, and hard work involved. With careful forethought and planning, however, double majoring can be a very enriching and positive experience.

The first question to consider if you’ve been thinking about adding a second major is simple: why double major? While there are as many answers to this question as there are ‘double major’ students, it can be useful to look at several common motivators. The first is a personal desire to receive a broader education. At a large university such as UCI, which offers approximately 80 majors and more than 60 minors, there is an almost overwhelming variety of subjects that might pique your interest. Maybe you’ve always been interested in art history, or would like the opportunity to learn more about the world through the Global Cultures major. In my own case, my growing interest in global politics and international affairs led me to pursue a double major in International Studies. While it may seem frivolous or impractical to take on another degree simply because you find a subject interesting, it is worth considering that there may be few other times in your life when you have the wide array of educational opportunities available to you as you.

Another common motivator for double majoring is a particular career goal. Perhaps you love dance, but are also considering a career in something such as engineering, chemistry, or psychology. By adding a second degree, you can effectively prepare yourself for a non-dance career while still taking advantage of all the artistic opportunities the dance major offers. If you are certain that you want a career in the dance world, another major may help you supplement your career goals. Adding a Business

Administration major, for example, would be useful if you plan on running your own studio, dancewear store, or company. A degree in Literary Journalism would be useful if you’d someday like to write for dance publications. Ultimately, your reason for choosing to double major can be anything that makes sense to you personally – take advantage of the academic opportunities available to you at UCI while you can!

Whatever your reasons, there are several things you should keep in mind throughout the decision-making process. One is the effect adding a second major will have on your experience as a dance major. Based on my own experience, there can be quite a few scheduling difficulties. Scheduling classes for the upcoming quarter becomes a veritable juggling act as you try to fit in technique classes and dance electives alongside the classes required for your other major. Be prepared to sacrifice at times in both majors, as you’ll likely have to miss out on taking classes you’d like to take in one major in order to take classes required for the other. I found this to be especially true given the small size of the dance department, compared to a larger department where numerous sections of any given class are offered throughout the year. Similarly, if the thought of missing out on a particular dance elective or performance opportunity because of commitments to another major isn’t okay with you, you may want to reconsider the idea of becoming a double major.

While many people may view the dance major as an easy, artsy, or “fluffy” major, we all know how much hard work goes into technique classes, rehearsals, and dance lecture classes. Taking on the additional course load of a second major will have a definite and tangible impact on your workload – your time management, organizational, and study skills will be seriously put to the test. I experienced this when I made the decision to add a second major in spring quarter of my freshman year; trying to tackle multiple technique classes, classes for my new

major, a breadth class, and Drama 101 (a required 4-unit theatre production course where dance majors learn hands-on what goes on behind the scenes in areas such as lighting or costuming). It put a serious strain on my ability to keep up with everything. While you'll learn how to better manage your schedule with time, the transition period can be rough.

The amount of time and money you are willing to spend on your college education is also important to consider. While the dance degree alone can be completed in three to four years, adding a second major can prolong your time at UCI, with subsequent financial implications. Taking a fifth year to finish one or both degrees may allow you more breathing room in terms of scheduling, but it will also land you with another year of tuition payments. If you are determined to finish in four years, you're most likely looking at one or several sessions of summer classes, and they don't come cheap. Summer session fees are charged by the number of units taken, at a higher rate than that charged during the regular school year. Talking with the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships can be helpful in figuring out what is or isn't feasible.

Once you've decided that you'd like to add another major, you'll need to communicate with the relevant school and department. The requirements for adding a major vary significantly from one school to another. All require a minimum GPA, which can vary from a 2.0 to a 2.7. Some require you to complete a certain sequence of courses; to add a Sociology degree, for example, you must first complete five courses from the School of Social Sciences, all of which must be completed with a grade of "C" or above. In some cases the requirements change if you have already completed more than 90 units at UCI, while other majors such as Biomedical Engineering allow no double major students at all. Your best resource is the UCI Change of Major website, which lays out the guidelines and requirements for each department and major. If you meet the requirements, you can fill out a formal application that will have to be approved

by both the Claire Trevor School of the Arts and the school of the major you're adding.

If for one reason or another you've decided that a double major is not right for you, you still have options to further your education in another subject. The first of these is a minor. UCI offers more than 60 subjects as minors. The general appeal of a minor is the reduced amount of work required to complete one compared to a second major. For example, if you wanted to complete a B.A. in Political Science, you would have to complete a total of fifteen courses, whereas for the minor you are only required to complete seven.

Some students take a completely different path, following their own course of study outside the delineations of a "major" or a "minor." One such student I spoke to, who plans to become a physician, decided to major in Dance without adding a second major in a more traditional pre-medical subject such as Biological Sciences. She explained that the B.A. in Dance allowed her to pursue her lifelong love of dance and that such a nontraditional major would help her stand out from the crowd of science majors when applying to medical school. She was also able to use time that might have otherwise been taken up with classes for a double major working and volunteering. She stressed, however, that not being an official student of the School of Biological Sciences had its downside. She often found it difficult to gain admittance to courses typically restricted to School of Biological Sciences majors, and in some cases had no other option but to take courses during the summer when such restrictions were lifted. While she doesn't regret taking this particular path, she strongly advises others to consider its potential difficulties.

Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to double major is a highly personal one, largely dependent on your personal interests, career goals, and financial situation. While adding a second major will present additional challenges and difficulties, it can also be a very useful and rewarding experience.

# **The Future of Drama 101**

*by Shannon Corcoran*

*This dance major requirement to work backstage is undergoing renovation to become a more valuable pre-professional experience.*

Drama 101 is a required theater production course that all dance majors must complete. It gives students the opportunity to participate in the construction and design of productions in the areas of costume, scenic, lighting, and audio—a good idea, right? Then why, when the topic of Drama 101 is mentioned to a dancer, almost every response is full of complaints, troubles, and typically ends on a negative note? It's apparent that this major requirement, intended to broaden our knowledge of theater behind the scenes, is considered a hassle for most students and is not taken seriously. In the past, scheduling conflicts with academic classes, outside work, and/or rehearsals have resulted in many students being unable to complete the 4 units during their freshman year, as they are advised to do. This turns into a greater issue because students who do not complete Drama 101 are technically not allowed to perform in dance concerts. Students become upset with this consequence and their attitudes towards Drama 101 become even more negative. A sophomore dance major shared, "I was never told that it was a big deal to not finish 4 units in my first year, but now I am frantically scrambling to finish the units in order to save my spot in a performance during winter quarter." Complaints and situations just like this demonstrate that dancers do not feel Drama 101 is benefitting them in any way.

This backstage experience should engage and teach dancers the ins and outs of the theater in preparation for future careers in the theater world. Currently, the production faculty is in the process of making changes to this program in hopes that students will take this requirement more seriously while they also gain knowledge and experience. If Drama 101 can become a cohesive and structured program and dancers can enter with an open mind and a willingness to work, these off-putting stereotypes and troubles can be left behind.

Dancers have the option of either signing up to work under a crew or a shop in a specialized area such as lighting, costumes, props, etc. Crews are responsible for working during the duration of a dance or drama production. Working in a shop is a commitment that spans an entire quarter and students choose the hours in which they work. Typically, students just choose the option that fits best with their schedule and don't bother to find out which area would be of most interest to them. Troubles and frustration tend to arise when students are given monotonous group tasks and finish all of the assigned tasks before their hours are complete for the day.

In the past, each crew has accepted a large number of students to ensure all procedures and tasks were completed on time. However, this over-enrollment is one of the biggest reasons students complain and finish their units without having learned anything. There are too many people working in one specific area of the theater and, instead of learning everything about that job, they are only assigned one task because there are plenty of others to do the rest of the job. For instance, when working as a member on the costume crew, costumes will need to be sewed, hemmed, ironed, laundered, organized, etc. But because there are only one or two faculty members in charge and eight crew members, each person gets delegated to a specific job, and you may simply end up ironing during the entire span of the show.

Keith Bangs, the newly appointed Claire Trevor School of the Arts production manager, says he is in the process of cutting back these large group numbers, because he believes the more opportunities students have to be responsible and in charge of a task, the more likely they are to fully commit to the work. He is also working on gaining more faculty involvement, which can potentially lead to one-on-one teaching and mentoring with each student. With these changes, Drama 101 should encourage



dancers to become engaged in the theater operations and acquire knowledgeable skills that will not only enhance their performing experiences at UCI but also outside of college.

After interviewing several undergraduate dance majors, ranging from freshman to seniors, who have already completed Drama 101, most prefer to crew dance concerts and/or work in the prop shop. An upside to working a dance show during freshman year is that it gives you a first-hand look at how productions are run in the dance department. When discussing the upsides and downsides of crew versus shop, Keith Bangs said that shop tends to appeal to those who are extremely artsy and creative, whereas crew appeals to those who are more operational. Working in a shop, especially scenic/prop shop, allows you to bring your creativity to the pieces you are creating, such as painting a scenic backdrop. Working in a shop also allows dancers to become more familiar with the staff they are assigned to because of its quarter-long commitment. Building professional relationships with the faculty is a great way to network and understand that, without their skills and presence, a show would not run smoothly or at all.

Bangs believes it is crucial to understand the underlying mechanisms and logistics of the theater before dancers begin their professional careers. Many dancers will go on to manage their own dance company at some point and without the understanding of what it takes to run a successful theater, artistic directors can easily be taken advantage of. Being familiar and

comfortable with professional staff at an undergraduate level is imperative to a well-rounded, successful career.

In addition to crew and shop, Drama 101 has just added another way to complete units called 101S: Strike and Special Events. Dancers who choose to enroll in 101S will be responsible for striking all shows during the specified quarter and working at special events if hours are not completed. Students learn the entire process of strike from start to finish and are expected to execute these procedures at the end of each show. This option works with many dancers' schedules because strike is only on Sundays and there are no weekday commitments. Examples of working at special events would include ushering at any events taking place in the theaters on campus, or volunteering to help where needed at events such as 10.10.10 at the Beall Center or the Claire Trevor Film Festival. Drama 101S still provides the resources to network and create professional relationships with faculty and directors of special events, but it does not include as much time spent in the theater as crew does.

It appears Drama 101 is moving in a positive direction with the planned changes of increased faculty involvement, smaller groups of students assigned to crews/shops, and the addition of 101S. If dancers keep an open mind and realize the opportunities and resources this requirement has to offer, Drama 101 has the potential to be a highlight of students' time here at UCI as a dance major.

# Above and Beyond the Dance Degree – Profiling the Choreographic BFA

*by Jessica Hambright*

So you got into UCI for a degree in Dance – congratulations! It's quite an achievement. Our program has one of the most well-rounded curriculums in dance you will find in these United States, making it a hotspot for some of the best dancers around. But what does a “well-rounded” program actually mean?

It means that our department offers a far more in-depth approach to almost all aspects of dance – history, notation, technique, and of course, choreography – than other dance schools. There are other schools that offer a choreographic BFA (none in California), but they mostly offer a BFA focused on Performance. In a perilous economic time, the in-depth specialty degree that our school is still able to offer is remarkable.

Choreography, or the composition of dance, differs quite a bit from the act of dancing – it requires a different skill set and vocabulary that our program fully explores. Being versed in the ways of a choreographer can drastically change your dance education in that it makes you think much harder about what you are doing. Our faculty knows the benefits of fleshing out a dance degree with a broad knowledge of choreography, so we offer the only Bachelor of Fine Arts in Choreography in the UC system. Anyone can apply, and I highly suggest that you do.

The coursework to complete the BFA is certainly rigorous. All of the current BFA candidates agree it takes a determined student who, as senior Shane Scopatz said, has an “authentic appetite for learning about dance.” This appetite should be large, given that there are more classes required for the BFA than there are for a BA. However, students don't find that the extra classes are technically extra work – if you have the fire in you that defines a truly dedicated choreographer, the class material should feel like information that you want to be exposed to.

Here are the additional classes required to complete the program – first, you must take the lower division choreography series (A, B, C).

Upper division choreography (A, B, C), with C being interchangeable with video choreography, is taken after the 60 series. There are also your design classes, both lighting and costume design. Rachel Berman noted that she has benefited a lot from the costume design class in particular, saying that the tools and strategies she has learned have influenced her choreographic method. Also required is the Drama 30A class, which is the first in a series of introductory acting classes, plus an additional 4 elective units taken from another art discipline, be it studio art, music, or drama. Lastly, you must present your choreography 2 times either in Physical Graffiti or in some other way you work out with the professors, such as an individual or shared concert.

After speaking with the senior choreographers graduating this year, I have found that the process of finishing the BFA in choreography has affected us all in similar ways, while also leading us each on our individual paths to fulfill our distinctive creative careers. First, each of us started out at this school with different thoughts about choreography. Rachel and I both found that we were intimidated by the kind of work that was going on and found it beneficial to really watch the process before becoming immersed in it. Politeia Le reflected that he was much more comfortable coming to a rehearsal as a dancer rather than a choreographer and joined the BFA program to challenge himself and to “develop a deeper connection and understanding of movement.” Shane and I both were aware that we were interested in choreography before we got here, and we found the opportunity to learn more about it too good to turn away. I have known I wanted to be in a directorial role in dance for some time, and I worked on developing that part of myself by constantly setting my own pieces at my home studio in Santa Barbara.

After we had been exposed to more of the BFA curriculum, it was clear that our

specialization was supplementing our dance degree in very positive ways. I discovered that in technique class, having knowledge of choreographic method allowed me to analyze movement in a way that makes it real and present in space. It makes me think about what dancers are doing in a structural, methodical way. I feel that I dance better when I'm able to look at fellow dancers with an analytical eye to see whether they are doing what the professor has asked for. Politeia thinks that the BFA hasn't so much affected his degree but more his experience as "a dancing body and mind." Rachel has realized how much her extra knowledge has helped her analyze other work that she sees onstage and feels more confident in her critique of dance; and Shane feels that he has learned more about both sides of the artistic process, as a dancer and a choreographer. We all agree that we have learned much more about dance by supplementing our degree with the BFA.

Another component of the BFA worth recognizing is the community that is built within it. Politeia notes that there are not very many of us, which creates an intimate setting where we must be honest and courageous. We all watch each other's work and give feedback – Politeia calls it a "beautiful thing to have faith in someone who comments on your work." I couldn't agree more. We watch each other's entire process knowing that we all will comment thoughtfully. I think this skill helps you look at your own work in a detached and critical way. Shane points out that, "When you watch a dance you are doing research that you can learn from." It's hard to not be harsh on yourself, but when you have colleagues helping you see what needs to be done, the process is a lot easier. Rachel points to another advantage to working in a community – we learn the language necessary to discuss work at this high academic level in our feedback sessions. We all know that there are things that just don't work in a dance, but how do you say that? Professor Loretta Livingston, the instructor of both the upper and lower division choreography series, always encourages us never to merely say, "I liked it." We learn how to say why, giving our opinions in a constructive way.

One of the great things about the BFA is that we can all choreograph in any style we want. Each of us is different: Politeia categorizes his work as having a balletic vocabulary with modern dance values; Shane and Rachel both see modern and contemporary styles as a main genre; while I look at myself as a theatrical choreographer. Our training here has certainly affected what our work looks like now, and we all recognize that dance-makers are on a constant learning curve and can change at any time. A closed mind is the last thing you want to have as a choreographer.

Of course, there is some degree of difficulty attached to the workload of a choreography student. As with any job, there are deadlines that need to be met. While you may not feel inspired, if you have a date when you need to show work, then you better have something to show. Politeia said it best: "The creative process isn't linear, and creation doesn't always happen when you want. It is hard to be able to experience outside inspiration when you are so busy, but that just means you need to savor and be a witness of what we consider the less significant moments." Another difficulty is finding dancers when you need them. I tend to like larger casts, but finding many committed dancers is hard. When I don't get what I want, I am not totally satisfied. Dissatisfaction is a taxing emotion, yet it is often felt in a choreographic setting. There are also the logistical problems of getting all your classes to fit in where you need them. Both Shane and Rachel are also completing BFAs in Performance, so their schedules are particularly tricky.

Our wonderful school gives us so many opportunities to perform. It is only fair, then, that we undergraduates get a chance to share our own choreography as well. *Physical Graffiti* is the undergraduate choreography showcase, where choreographers choose their own dancers at the dancer audition, have a very short time to set some work, and audition that work to get into the concert. It is not a guarantee that just because you are a BFA your piece will be accepted – Shane and I learned that firsthand. While not being chosen for the show is difficult, it is just as much a learning experience as working on the show is, because rejection is a part of the performance

world that every dancer must come to accept. Politeia and Rachel have both had pieces accepted and commented on the type of work necessary to be successful. Rachel said,

It's pretty frightening. You have maybe 4 hours to make something clear and communicative to show for the audition. Then you go on spring break when you and all your dancers forget everything. Then you come back and have about 6-8 rehearsals to make a piece, meet with costuming, lighting, and mentors, and pull together your costumes and other elements. It's nuts. So I guess it takes speedy work and a go-with-it kind of attitude. I had a great time with my piece—still stressful, but great—because it was one of the first I did. I could really find what was in the work and what the dancers were putting into it and pull that out instead of try to make it be something. I think that helped me complete it in the time limit, but it still wasn't completely ironed out until the show week.

Politeia agreed that the amount of time given to work is short and therefore stressful, so organization is important. Both choreographers feel that having a clear vision and something to communicate is important – a flashy dance won't get you anywhere.

As you can see, there is much to be learned from going through the BFA. After 4 years of hard work, I can certainly say that the art of choreography is complex and extremely rewarding. That being said, here is what you need to do if the program interests you: First, take Choreography 60A! Start a dialogue with Professor Livingston – she is extremely approachable and wants to help you. Then, go to the Student Affairs office and get the BFA in Choreography application. Fill it out with heart and soul. The faculty will review your statement and decide if you are right for the program.

Now, some words of wisdom from all of us who have gone through it already:

- If you are hesitant in applying, just do it! It doesn't cost anything extra and the amount of learning is so much more than just a BA.
- If you have thoughts in your mind, journal them so you don't forget! Or better yet, just get to work! We have 6 wonderful dance spaces that are open until 10 pm daily. The sign up sheet is in the dance office. This is a blessing – it is very difficult and costly to find space in the “real world,” so make use of what the university system offers.
- Watch as much work as you can, including studio art shows, movies, dance film, whatever! It will be relevant, somehow.
- Shane says that “how you learn is in your hands. If you continue to renew your intrigue in movement art you will be successful.”
- Don't be afraid to approach current BFA students! Everyone is really passionate and would be happy to share their experiences with you.
- If you are auditioning a piece for a concert, try to avoid choreographing exactly to a song. The choreographic method here at UCI is generally to find movement that can speak for itself, then find a sound choice to match it. The work will be more legitimate if it can stand alone, without a popular song.
- Remember, if you don't get a piece into a concert, ANYONE can show their work in the 10<sup>th</sup> week performances.
- If you have another major, don't let that stop you! Will Johnston completed an engineering degree in addition to his BFA, and Rie Castro is also an English major.
- If you decide you want to add the BFA later on, that's fine! Rachel just recently decided to add her BFA, and she is graduating this year. It is possible! Just make sure you get your requirements out of the way.

Finally, come see the graduating BFA thesis projects! These are culminations of all we have learned, and watching work is always helpful to choreographers. Good luck with all of your endeavors!

# Auditioning Internationally

*Everything from how to get your passport to job-hunting in the dance world abroad*

*by Marcos Perez*

Like most dancers at the University of California, Irvine, I have grown up in the American dance setting. I studied ballet, modern, and jazz in California and a little in New York, but I have not ventured beyond the U.S. border to learn new styles. I have only learned international dance forms from teachers and choreographers and have researched these styles in school through videos and books. Now, at the end of my schooling here at UCI, I am planning to audition for companies in Europe and hopefully attain a job overseas.

As an American citizen, I can easily be employed in the U.S., but I'm now interested in what goes on outside the borders of this country. I decided to research European companies in terms of what they have to offer and learn how to go about auditioning there. The first obstacle is not being a citizen in the country where you're auditioning. In Europe, for instance, it is illegal even to enter a country looking for work without a work permit. Here is one story from Michaela Lola Abrera, a Polish dancer traveling through Europe and auditioning for companies:

"I was approaching the end of my legal stay in Europe – where citizens of the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK are allowed to travel for six-months within the continent... Acquiring a work permit in Europe is a challenge. It will make you feel like you're perpetually banging your head against a wall, as you'll often find that you can't be granted a work permit without a job, but at the same time, most companies won't hire you without this document."

But if you're up for it, you can start your search for European possibilities at home. On the internet, you can find specific companies you would like to audition for. By browsing company websites and looking at their dancer profiles, you can get a feel for what is out there. Ask yourself these questions:



*Marcos Perez*

- How large is the company?
- What is the age range of the dancers (if they post their ages)?
- What are their dance backgrounds?
- Do the majority of dancers hold college degrees?
- Are any of them American?
- Is the company holding auditions?

The last one is important. Many times, companies will not be hiring at all for the season. However, if it is a company that seems a good fit for you, inquire to double-check if they are hiring or not. Send a resume while you're at it. A company will not always post their job offerings for fear of a large number of responses... or you might be lucky and they just lost a dancer.

Next, contact your desired company with your information and find an appropriate time to audition. You should inform the person handling your audition that you are a US citizen. Rambert Dance Company, for instance, will not audition anyone who is not eligible to work in the United



Kingdom. You'll want to be familiar with traveling restrictions. As a U.S. Citizen, your visits to different parts of the world are limited in different ways, so check out the latest restrictions for wherever you're headed. You should also check immigration policy for the specific country where the company you are auditioning for is. This may help slim down your list of potential companies.

You don't have to have a work permit just to travel to a European country. You can simply tell the border patrol agent that you are visiting the country to research dance performance and to be a tourist. It's important to know that before a company hires a Non-European Union (EU) citizen, they must demonstrate that they cannot fill the position with an EU citizen (check this aspect out at [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com)). This may discourage some dancers, but companies still seek to hire talent from beyond their borders. In order to do this, a company needs to have a post that publicly states that they are looking to hire; this announcement needs to be posted for 2-4 weeks, and if the company still has not found a dancer, then they are able to hire from outside the European Union. Luckily, those with valuable skills, such as talent in dance and a degree, stand a good chance in attaining an international job.

As with most auditions, it is best to try to take company class, if possible, rather than attending an open call. This will give you a better chance for the director to see and evaluate your work, and you could possibly obtain helpful feedback about your performance in class. If the audition goes well, and you are hired, the company should sponsor your application for a work permit. This is often a long period of paperwork and proof of eligibility for your stay in the specific country. If a company is unwilling or unable to sponsor your work permit, you can simply go through an immigration agency, such as *workpermit.com*.

While the United States has a wonderful array of dance styles, it can still seem difficult to find the right company. This is one major reason why dancers pursue careers outside of the U.S. Others simply want to work in a different country and experience another culture and lifestyle. Whatever reasons take you beyond the borders of the U.S., it is vital to research the immigration work policy of your destination. Here are some useful resources when doing such research.

- [www.workpermit.com](http://www.workpermit.com)
- [www.globalvisas.com](http://www.globalvisas.com)
- [www.transitionsabroad.com](http://www.transitionsabroad.com)

## Summertime...and the Dance is Intensive

*Here's how to choose—and use—a summer program to your best advantage.*

*by Kellie St. Pierre*

“How many of you danced this summer?”

This question seems to surface from dance teachers everywhere at the start of a new academic year. Teachers are not asking merely to single out those who were not able to attend “ballet bootcamp.” The question is asked in hope that their students were able to take advantage of the many benefits offered through a dance intensive. These programs can supplement a students’ education and dancing, offering experiences that a university might not. They not only keep you dancing over the summer, but also provide an opportunity for exposure to other areas of the dance world, the ability to work closely with established and emerging artists and choreographers, a chance to network, and the capacity to achieve individual growth.

### **Exposure Outside the University**

I can credit much of my development and knowledge depth to the teachers I have been able to work with here at UCI. I’m not the same person I was four years ago, before entering college. However, my summer experiences at San Francisco Conservatory of Dance (SFCDD), as well as American Dance Festival (ADF), also contributed to the shaping of my individual and artistic growth, as well as influencing my dancing and approach to dance. Many factors contribute to this, one being a fresh environment and access to variation. Any routine can become stale. Different learning styles from different places, new information, and new perspectives can disrupt the mundane pattern that arises because of the academic school year schedule.

Another reason to attend summer programs is that the dance world is not confined to the university. It is extremely essential, especially if pursuing a dance career, to put yourself out there and see where in the dance world you can find your niche. More exposure will allow you to look at work being made, and most importantly, recognize your options. The



*Kellie St. Pierre  
Photo by Natalie Johnson*

strongest contributor to growth is the opportunity to concentrate only on dance. During the school year, it is impossible to dedicate your whole self to the study and research of dance; there are too many demands from all other academic subjects, second majors, minors, and extracurricular activities. To be completely consumed in just dance allows for limitless growth. It is at these moments, when you put yourself in unfamiliar situations, where you learn a lot about yourself as well.

Director and founder of SFCD Summer Lee Rhatigan describes her 6 years of experience conducting summer intensives: “With the potent nature of a shorter intensive structure, I feel that everything is magnified. I have seen lives changed, life-long friends made, and often this happens because a young person is away from the environment in which they may feel they are ‘established’ as someone, for good or not. In a way, a clean and exciting slate is on offer at a good summer program.”

### **Networking**

Many students, regardless of their field study, dedicate their summers to internships and work experience. In our field, summer intensives are exactly that. Look at it from this perspective: the time and energy a dancer invests with a certain artist/choreographer is equivalent to the time and energy a medical student invests in an internship at a hospital. The dancer is getting proficient experience, working with and alongside the choreographer. And in addition to learning a set of skills and practices, there is an extra bonus: networking, networking, NETWORKING! Summer intensives are the perfect place to meet people—other dancers, established artists, choreographers, dance-makers, or people that just want to talk about dance. In the dance field, people are one of our most valuable resources, especially with how incredibly connected the dance world is; if you meet one person, you will soon discover you share mutual friends, teachers, and even experiences. Who knows?—maybe these people will be a “free couch” on an audition tour to New York! The same applies to working with different artists and choreographers: you work with one choreographer who knows another choreographer, who is looking for dancers to work with and hire! Word of mouth and good recommendations are nothing but good news. If nothing else, all this networking looks great on a resume!

### **Natural Habits of Dancers**

Dancers can never stop learning. It is our job is to be a “sponge” and soak up as much information from as many different people as

possible. There are so many artists that each can offer unique and valuable information. Dancers share the desire to be versatile, so it is natural for us to want to expand our information banks and improve on our skill sets and practices. The more tools you accumulate, the more you can offer as an artist, and provide choreographers with something they can resonate with.

### **Picking the one that’s right for you**

The great thing about summer intensives is that they are everywhere, all over the globe, each offering different options. By asking yourself, “What do I want to get out of my summer?” you can pick the summer program that would benefit you most for your dancing and career path. For example, are you looking to fine tune one particular genre of dance? American Ballet Theatre (ABT) focuses on ballet, whereas, at American Dance Festival (ADF), you can give equal weight to many different styles, such as ballet, modern, and Afro-Cuban. Are you pursuing a dance company and want to use this time to familiarize yourself with the group and their style? Several companies, such as Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Paul Taylor Dance Company, and Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, use their summer intensives to offer their unique and “branded” style to interested dancers. Opportunities to work with company artistic directors and company members are otherwise very rare, and programs like these often hold company auditions at the end of the program.

Another important factor in the decision process is the size of the program—how many people you want to be working with over the 4-6 weeks. My experiences with SF Conservatory and ADF were very different, in that SF Conservatory was run by four core choreographers and created 3 groups of about 15 dancers, intended for an intimate experience, while ADF creates a large sense of community with quite a few faculty members and about 300 dancers. Their program aims at building a borderless center in which many different talents can be shared. These are both excellent programs with two different dynamics.

Looking at everything offered in a summer intensive influenced my decision about where I wanted to go. Many summer intensives include performing in a showcase for the public or and an audition at the end of the program. Many intensives also offer an outside practice like yoga. Does the program include choreographing opportunities? Do you get to see any live performances or shows during the program? Are there smaller workshops within the program that you can be a part of? Any additional perk should be taken into careful consideration, for these factors are what make the program distinct from the others.

Looking back at my experience at ADF, I can say my life is now altered. I had an incredible number of opportunities during the 6-week-long program. I took 3 to 4 classes a day, each from different established choreographers, including Ming Lung Yang and Abby Yager (former Trisha Brown dancers and distinguished choreographers); Roger Belman (former Laura Dean dancer and project-based choreographer); Tatiana Baganova (artistic director of Provincial Dances Theatre); Elizabeth Corbett (former William Forsythe dancer); Richard Siegal (former William Forsythe dancer and artistic director of The Bakery Dance and Performance); and William Forsythe himself!

If all this professional interaction wasn't enough, I participated in weekly contact improv

jams, took additional drop-in /master classes taught by touring dance company members, and watched 16 professional dance companies perform. I participated in a 4-week Forsythe workshop that ended in a performance and showcase of our study on improvisational techniques as well as solos from his repertoire. I was also part of a group that did a site-specific work at the Sarah P. Duke Gardens.

Having had all these opportunities, I can say that I have benefited enormously from summer intensives. My summer experiences at both San Francisco Conservatory of Dance and American Dance Festival created for me an outlet for profound individual and artistic growth and have acted as a rich tool to further expand my research and knowledge in dance. My continued passion and desire to seek a career in dance can be credited to the irreplaceable experiences from summer intensives. These experiences are lasting memories in my mind, and I find myself frequently referring back to what was gained over the previous summers. I encourage all dancers, especially dance majors, to seek these opportunities and reap the many benefits of a summer dance intensive!

Thanks to Summer Lee Rhatigan of the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance Summer Intensive, for our email interview of Nov 6, 2010.

# A Leap of Faith: A Dancer's Foray into the World of Gymnastics

*One dance major tumbles into skills that enhance her performance.*

*by Kathryn Endo*

Although dance majors are often encouraged to explore various related fields, it is common to experience a certain degree of trepidation when venturing into a new, unfamiliar art form. This being the case, some basic information regarding what a dancer can expect to experience, risk, and gain when it comes to gymnastics may help to ease the transition. It is a common myth that gymnastics training must be started during childhood, but I discovered this to be untrue, particularly for trained movers. Basic principles learned from dance can often be applied to the study of other styles of movement. Furthermore, skills often not introduced until a high level of competency is reached in dance may be taught at the most elementary level of gymnastics, or vice versa. Therefore, even high-level dancers can grow from an exposure to basic gymnastics training.

Perhaps even more than muscular strength, one of the most highly developed skills possessed by gymnasts is a very strong sense of full-body proprioception. As dance majors we are often trained to be very intensely in tune with the details of our legs, ankles, and feet. Choreography for our arms can be almost an afterthought in styles such as ballet, tap, and commercial jazz, and often becomes mainly background for the intricate footwork. As a result, many dancers entering college struggle with developing a strong understanding of where and how their limbs and torso are arranged. In particular, those dancers accustomed to relying on a mirror to check their placement find it difficult to learn to use biofeedback to actually *feel* their positioning. It takes years of training in modern dance to hone one's body awareness, and even then we continue to undergo a eternal process of refinement. Gymnastics dramatically enhances this ability from the first day of training, making it an especially valuable tool for those of us brought up with a mirror fixation.

My first gymnastics class—at the age of 17—began with basic skills such as cartwheels, forward rolls, and handstands. It was apparent early on that my dance training would be sadly insufficient to perform the tasks I was given. Although skills on the balance beam came quite easily and naturally because of their strong similarity to dance steps, turns, and leaps, it was quite bewildering to see just how foreign even the most elementary tumbling was from my experience in ballet, tap and jazz. A gymnast is expected to bear weight using the muscles in their arms and back with equal nonchalance as their legs. For a dancer, this can be a highly useful skill, even if it's disconcerting at first. While intellectually dancers know the difference between an arched, straight, or hollow back, it becomes much more obvious when having the wrong shape leads not only to an undesired line but also brings the practitioner toppling ungracefully to the ground. This forces the dancer to learn quickly how to recognize the feelings that can identify their body positions.

Beyond proprioception, one of the most valuable skills dancers learn from gymnastics is to conquer physical fear. Despite their facility of motion, many dancers have a certain fear of falling or being injured in a traumatic accident while dancing. Gymnastics revolves around learning to banish these fears so that one can engage in flips and other often alarming movement without being limited by trepidation. Gymnast-dancer Brett Hamby commented that "The first thing you learn in gymnastics is how to fall safely because you *will* fall often, but this familiarity frees you from the fear of it. Then, there's no reason to be hesitant about trying a new move in dance class because you know that even if everything goes wrong, you know how to catch yourself."

A common concern for dancers considering venturing out into this related field is worry about the increased danger of injuries

resulting from gymnastics. However, the percentage of people who are injured from gymnastics, particularly at the more elementary levels, is far lower than many would suspect. In the three years I have been training, I have never received worse than bruises, and UCI dance major Justin Keats agreed that in five years of gymnastics he “never had an injury besides blisters.” While injuries are always a possibility in any physical activity, they are far more prevalent among the more rigorously competitive team gymnastics.

A more real prohibiting factor for the college dancer looking to explore training in this field is finding the money to pay for it. Since it can be difficult for starving college students to afford weekly gymnastics lessons, I found a way to pursue this training on a limited budget. Most of the dance majors I interviewed had taught dance before, and I discovered through personal experience that this expertise transferred easily to coaching gymnastics. While the gymnast must internalize and feel the corrections, the skills necessary to be a coach deal with visually recognizing lines and placement from the outside. Consequently, dance training turns out to be highly effective preparation to be a skillful gymnastics coach. Gymnasts must be completely re-trained to translate what they feel when doing each skill into visual clues when they instruct others. This expectation to completely train any new coach is perfect for the dancer hoping to enter the gymnastics field, because before one is expected to teach any new skill, it is

demonstrated and explained in detail with common corrections and mistakes highlighted. By the time a dancer is performing at the collegiate level, he or she is able to learn and memorize new movement sequences at an accelerated rate, further making them uniquely qualified for coaching gymnastics. A major benefit of being hired as a gymnastics coach is that I was encouraged to learn the various moves myself, and could take classes to further my own skills at the gym free of charge. This proved to be a highly advantageous arrangement. I could have four to six valuable hours of training per week to develop my own skills and not drain my limited funds. Through these means I was able to learn the aerial, handsprings, handstand walks, front/back walkovers, and other “tricks” that have often proved useful in the dance industry.

Although it was intimidating at first to venture into a field of study wholly new to me, I am glad I did. I found the skills I gained to be highly applicable to my dancing. The greater upper body strength smoothed my transition into modern dance immensely and continues to aid me in my practice. Furthermore, a gymnast’s full-body awareness has been an invaluable aid in my studies, as is the ability to move in and out of the floor without fear or hesitation. My journey of exploration into the world of gymnastics has helped me grow as a mover immeasurably, and I have complete conviction that a similar adventure into this field can add to any dancer’s confidence and versatility.

Interviews that contributed to this essay:

Hamby, Brett. Personal Interview. 2 November 2010.

Keats, Justin. Personal Interview. 9 November 2010.

Perez, Marcos. Personal Interview. 8 November 2010.

Additional personal interviews with dance majors who wished to remain anonymous.



## Assessing Your Injuries

*How do you know when you can handle it and when you need help?*

*by Amy Quanbeck*

While more health and injury resources are coming into UCI's dance department, we cannot become complacent in taking care of ourselves, staying aware of our bodies, and self-assessing our injuries. Dr. Jeff Russell, Assistant Professor specializing in dance science on the dance department faculty at UCI, has 30 years of experience in sports medicine, orthopaedics, and dance medicine, and has been a great help in providing valuable education to dancers in injury prevention and anatomy and kinesiology. His free dance injury clinics have provided many students the opportunity to learn more about injuries and their treatment. We are lucky to have him as a resource, since not all universities or dance departments—and few professional companies—have such a resource.

While I hope that I have sufficient care wherever I end up in the dance world, I know that this is not guaranteed, so I have decided to provide some insight into assessing your own injuries and knowing when to see a professional. By drawing some attention to body awareness and providing some quick tips and tools for assessing injuries, this guide may help you save some money in medical bills, recover as quickly as possible from injuries, and help you maintain a healthy dancing body.

Through my research, I was pleased to find that many professional companies and shows had a physical therapist or athletic trainer, and that even more are following the trend. The Performing Arts Physical Therapy Program in New York City is one institution in support of this process. In addition to providing free injury clinics in NYC, they provide physical therapists and athletic trainers to Broadway shows including *HAIR* and *Mamma Mia*, as well as professional companies such as Paul Taylor Dance Company, David Parsons Dance Company, and Hubbard Street Dance Company ([Performing Arts Physical Therapy](#) web site). Also in NYC, the Harkness Center for Dance Injuries offers clinics and

services to Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Ballet Hispanico, Cedar Lake, Cirque du Soleil, Complexions, Dance Theatre of Harlem, *Grease*, The Juilliard School, Mark Morris Dance Group, Martha Graham Company, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, and *Wicked*, to name a few ([Physical Therapy](#)). On the east coast, University of California, San Francisco, offers an incredible sports medicine and dance injury clinic and provides for companies such as ODC, as well.

Because these companies and shows advertise these services, I would hope that they are readily available, easy to contact and make appointments, and have spaces to perform any injury assessments. However, because we all know that this is not always the case, I want to give a few tips about managing our bodies and injuries ourselves to the best of our ability. One way to prepare ourselves for the professional dance world that so many of us will be diving into very soon is knowing how to dialogue with an athletic trainer or physical therapist and to be able to determine when you know enough to help yourself, and when you need professional advice.

Professor Russell has educated us about the typical questionnaire a physical therapist or athletic trainer uses. A clinical examination consists of four parts: a history portion, inspection and palpation, special tests, and then the assessment and plan. Before I give advice about how to answer the questionnaire, I would like to stress that it is critical to attempt only what you can do and to realize the extent and limit of your knowledge. Because most dancers are not certified doctors, physical therapists, or athletic trainers, I don't want to support people trying to care for injuries past their level of education. To help distinguish when you know enough, and when you should seek further help, I will also provide a few quick symptoms and problems that are a basic guideline for when to see the doctor. However, as always, if you are uncomfortable or

unsure of your self-assessment, seeing someone is always the right option.

For the history portion, be prepared to answer the following:

- When did it happen?
- What were you doing at the time of the injury?
- How did the injury occur?
- Did you hear a pop, crack, snap, or other unusual sensation?
- What type of pain occurred at the time of the injury? (sharp, dull, superficial, deep, constant, intermittent, twinge or achy)
- Have you had a similar injury previously?
- How does it feel now compared to when the injury first occurred?
- How is the injury limiting your activity?
- How painful is it? Rate your pain on a scale from 0 to 10, 0 being no pain, 10 being the most painful thing experienced. Another helpful tip in rating is that, while it's subjective, if you keep your scale as consistent as possible, this will help you determine if your pain is getting worse, better, or staying the same.
- If you think it is a muscle you also want to think about things such as:
  - Does it hurt when I contract the muscle?
  - Does it hurt when I stretch the muscle?

(Russell 166-167)

The next part of the exam consists of the physical inspection of the injury, or the observable portion. This consists of a visual inspection looking for:

- Deformity
- Swelling
- Discoloration or bruising
- Gait (walking) discrepancies, e.g., a limp
- Difficulty getting into bed or into a chair
- Reduction in joint range of motion
- Bilateral comparison (comparing the right side to left side, uninjured to the injured

side—one thing to keep in mind is if the other side was injured previously, it may not be a suitable “normal” to compare the new injured area)

- Another thing to keep in mind for this section is that although it is hard to be objective when observing yourself, you want to be as honest as possible so that you don't trick yourself into thinking the injury is less than it is, which could result in more damage

(Russell 166-167)

The next section is the palpation where you will want to feel the injury, looking for a localization of pain or determining if the pain is more spread out. It is also helpful to determine if you're hurting on a bony structure or on soft tissue like muscles and tendons. Once you know the specific area of the injury, it is easier to look at an anatomy book to determine what sort of structures are around the injured area, looking at specific bones, muscles, and nerves to narrow your search.

The next part of the assessment consists of the special tests related to more specific injuries. Because many of these tests are advanced, I advise you to take more care in deciding what you can and can't do. One thing that all people should be able to do is the range of motion test. The active range of motion test consists of you trying to move the injured area and assessing how much motion you have lost since the injury. Other simple tests you can do yourself include resisted range of motion (trying to move the injured area against resistance) and simple functional testing (can you do motions that are normal to all people and not specific to dancers?).

The assessment ends with an initial diagnosis and a plan of action. Once you have gone through the first steps of the assessment, you can use that information, such as the symptoms you have (the pain, where it is, how it happened, etc.), to look at anatomy and injury books to look up probable injuries. Here is another instance where I encourage you to know what you can handle and what you can't. Once you have a better understanding of your injury (even if it's only that you think it affects a muscle or if it affects a bone), you can start planning how

you will take care of your injury. The best response to most injuries is to “RICE,” or Rest, Ice, Compress, and Elevate, for at least the first 48 hours after injury. “Rest” means to stop or reduce movement that causes pain, including dancing! “Ice” means to put ice on the injury for 20 minutes, then leave it off for 60 minutes before putting it back on. “Compress” means to wrap the injury with an elastic “ACE” bandage, starting away from the heart and wrapping toward the heart. “Elevate” means to rest the injured area on a chair or other platform that lifts it above the level of the heart. More specific injuries will have more specific treatments and plans.

Another appropriate response for all injuries is giving yourself a time limit to check-in again. Re-assess the injury after a day, then two, then three, and pay attention to whether it is better or worse. The most important part of this portion of the exam for dancers looking at their own injuries is knowing when they’ve done enough and knowing when they need more help. To help, here are a few guidelines to use to know when to go to the doctor:

- If the pain is worse or doesn’t get better in 4 to 5 days (and it isn’t something chronic that you’ve experienced in the past)—a good guideline is that it should start feeling better 3-4 days
- If it is swollen or discolored heavily and doesn’t go down with ice
- If there was an unusual feeling with the injury: crunch, grate, pop

(Russell 165)

While I would love to be able to tell you the symptoms of every injury and the treatments along with it, there is too much information to cover in a single article. However, here are some resources that you can use to look up some common dance injuries and potential problems:

- Harkness Center Website < <http://www.med.nyu.edu/hjd/harkness/patients/injuries/>>.
- Journal of Dance Medicine & Science
- Dance Anatomy and Kinesiology by Karen Clippinger (Book)
- Dance Technique and Injury Prevention by Justin Howse (Book)
- Preventing Dance Injuries by Ruth Solomon, John Solomon, Sandra Cerny Minton (Book)

In summary, being able to ask and answer these questions helps to narrow the search for what injury you may have suffered or what inconvenience you may be dealing with. It also allows you to assess the severity of the injury and know whether or not you can handle it or if you need more help. In order to answer these questions, I encourage all dancers to become aware of their bodies and environments; pay attention to what you eat, what surfaces you dance on, what shoes you wear, how well you sleep, how you sit, and most importantly, how you feel overall. Developing a sense of self-awareness is key to determining if you are suffering soreness or an injury. While it’s normal to start paying attention when your body starts hurting, you also need to be aware of what “normal” feels like to have something to compare an injury to.

One way to help keep track of injuries and their progressions is with a notebook, dating your entries and being clear in your descriptions of pain or soreness so you can track the process or go back to it if a re-injury occurs. Knowing how to evaluate an injury can help us help ourselves and each other in the professional world. We can save costs as long as we are smart about when we know enough and when we need some extra help or a professional opinion.

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## Poster Boy for Dance Science

*One dance major travels to the U.K. to attend a professional academic conference for knowledge, networking, and some fun along the way.*

*by Evan D. Johnston*

Many university students are familiar with academic conferences on a superficial level, in that professors often disappear in the middle of the term to attend them, but they probably don't know what going to a conference entails. In the last two years, some UC Irvine dance majors have found out first-hand when they have presented papers at the annual meetings of the International Association for Dance Medicine & Science, known as IADMS. In addition to presenting their original research, the students were exposed to a welter of different ideas that all had one thing in common: they sought to examine an aspect of dance through a scientific lens. As one of the students who attended the most recent meeting of IADMS in England, I found the whole experience extremely stimulating and enjoyable. It's my hope that by sharing some of my experience with other undergraduates, they may be encouraged to consider attending this or another academic conference themselves.

The International Association for Dance Medicine & Science was created in 1990 by "an international group of dance medicine practitioners, dance educators, dance scientists, and dancers"<sup>1</sup> whose values are reflected in the organization's mission statement: "IADMS enhances the health, well-being, training, and performance of dancers by cultivating educational, medical, and scientific excellence."<sup>1</sup> Although it began with fewer than forty founding members, the organization had more than one thousand members in January of 2011.<sup>2</sup> These people are diverse in their countries of origin, their experiences with dance, and their approaches to studying it, but they all share a common goal of helping to improve dance training, practice, and the healthcare of dancers.

IADMS holds a conference in a different city around the world each year. Attendees hear presentations of new ideas in dance medicine and science, but equally important is the opportunity

to interact with each other. There are relatively few institutions with dance medicine and science programs large enough to support more than one or two faculty members, so the opportunity to interact with others in the field is of great value. Although the meeting is designed to focus on the presentation of research, various social events such as parties, dance performances, and round-table lunches are included as well.

The 2010 meeting of IADMS was held in Birmingham, UK, and like any conference it revolved around lecture presentations. Seventy-seven lectures ranging from ten to fifty minutes in length were presented across three days between the hours of 9 a.m. 6:30 p.m. Given the brevity of the conference and the necessity for breaks, the volume of material necessitated that two lectures be held simultaneously in different rooms. The presentations were organized into two-hour blocks, connected by a thread or idea, and moderated by a respected practitioner with knowledge in the subfield. After each presentation, ten minutes were set aside for questions. As a first-time attendee, I frequently found it difficult to decide which lectures to attend, but the quality of the presentations was such that it was hard to make a bad choice. Although they were all interesting, the lectures I personally got the most out of were in-depth examinations of a particular syndrome, disease, or facet of clinical practice. There were also very rewarding lectures on applying science to dance pedagogy and practice.

Regardless of the quality of the presentation, there are some ideas about dance and human movement that are very difficult to understand without actually **moving!** And so, there were movement sessions about new approaches to teaching, held in a space where they could try the movement and receive feedback. One session explored the application of concepts from Bartenieff Fundamentals to

classical ballet,<sup>3</sup> while another examined dance alignment and correction from a medical perspective.<sup>4</sup> The movement sessions were particularly popular with present or former dancers, since the information offered was typically more immediately applicable to dance practice than the information in the lectures.

The last type of presentation, the research poster, was in some ways the simplest, but also potentially very powerful. Twenty-five posters were put up on the first day of the conference and remained accessible to all attendees for the duration. Because most people who attend the conference take the time to at least skim all the posters and read the ones they find interesting, an attractive poster can very easily reach a large number of people. On the second day of the conference, an hour was set aside during which presenters were available at their posters to answer any questions readers might have. As a poster presenter myself, I was worried someone would ask me a question I couldn't answer, or find some logical flaw in my research, but in fact I was able to dialogue quite well with those who came by, and one of the top researchers in dance psychology even complimented my work on pain coping and response in dancers! Although I didn't find out until after the conference, I won the award for the best poster created by a student. Even if I hadn't experienced such an encouraging response, it was still very gratifying to discourse with different people about my area of research and hear their ideas about how to continue studying the way dancers experience pain.

Of course, the discourse wasn't all academic. I started meeting people beginning in the hotel the day before the conference started,



*UCI delegates to IADMS 2010*

*From left: Kumiyo Kai, Evan Johnston, Christine Trebtske, Prof. Jeff Russell, Shannan Slagle, Monica Sanders*

and kept meeting more and more until I left on the final day. Opportunities for socializing abounded, and making new relationships while developing old ones was clearly a goal for many attendees. On the first night of the conference, a reception was held in a local museum, which afforded plenty of time to mix and mingle while enjoying a sizable collection of artworks. The following night a triple-bill dance performance gave delegates a taste of Birmingham's local dance scene, featuring a kathak piece, two brief balletic pas de deux, and a contemporary piece, each of which provoked passionate discussions among my group of friends. On the evening of the final day there was a party with a live band that I was unable to attend due to travel arrangements, but it offered yet more opportunity for having fun with one's colleagues from around

the world. There were also round-table lunches on the second day, which allowed people in related fields to get to know each other on a more informal level.

In order to promote interaction within subfields even further, an extra day was added after the conference for three special interest groups to further explore a particular theme within their respective disciplines. Teachers examined safe and effective dance practice while physiotherapists and athletic trainers focused on hypermobility in dancers. Those with a penchant for biomechanics spent the day learning about and using motion capture technology. The opportunity to work in smaller groups with like-

minded individuals was worth the extra cost for the members of my research group who attended.

As an experience, a conference such as the annual meeting of IADMS is, I think, a very valuable one, and I would recommend attending at least one conference to any student considering further study in a university setting. There was a great wealth of knowledge to be gained, and for anyone with an interest in an academic discipline, attending an appropriate conference would be well worth the time and money. I returned from IADMS with many ideas for future directions for research and am greatly looking forward to the 2011 meeting in Washington, D.C. Perhaps I'll see you there.

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## **Dancers working in health care ...what's the transition like?**

*If you have a talent for science and healing, there are lots of dance-related jobs you might pursue, from medicine to physical therapy to athletic training.*

*by Shannan Slagle*

Like other dance majors, I worry about the financial stability of a career in dance performance or dance teaching after college. And even if I don't dance for a living, I still want to have dance in my life! Fortunately, I also have an interest in anatomy and the health care field, so I have decided to go into some related field, most likely physical therapy. I want to help injured dancers of all types get back to full activity. For all of you dancers out there who are interested in a job related to this field or simply want to learn more about the system, here are some questions that I have been asked as about wanting to pursue a career in health care. My answers contain information about resources, job opportunities, and tips for overcoming potential challenges.

### **What are your job options?**

A variety of jobs allow you to help injured dancers. Some potential job fields include athletic training, physical therapy, and medicine.

### **How will you help dancers?**

If you want to work closely with a dance company, conservatory, or university, you can become a certified athletic trainer (ATC). As an ATC, you can help prevent, evaluate, and diagnose injuries with the approval of a doctor. You will also provide medical emergency care during performances and rehearsals. To be an ATC, you need to complete a four-year undergrad or grad athletic training program, and you must pass a board exam (<http://www.nata.org>).

Becoming a physical therapist (PT) is another option. PTs can rehabilitate dancers with injuries that have been diagnosed by a doctor. More often than not, their patients are referred to them by a doctor. PTs can help dancers with injuries that range from acute to chronic to post-surgical. They can also treat uninjured dancers for general wellness by using stretching, massage techniques, temperature dependent modalities,

and the like. In this field you can work in a PT clinic or hospital for dancers. Having your own practice is another way to go. To become a PT, you must go to a grad school with a PT program. Most PT schools have a three-year program. You can also get an MPT (Master of Physical Therapy) or a DPT (Doctor of Physical Therapy), the degree most employers look for now (<http://www.apta.org>). State schools in California now offer the DPT. There is also a board exam for physical therapy.

Another choice is to get your MD and specialize in dance injuries. Working in a city that has a major dance company or at a clinic specializing in performing arts medicine will provide you with great access to dancers that need medical care. Working as an orthopaedic surgeon is one option; primary care sports medicine and physical medicine/rehabilitation are two other specialties. Med school is four years, and after graduation you are required to pass a board exam, take two to three additional years of classes relating to your specialty, and do a three-to five-year training residency in a specialty of your choice (<http://www.studentdoc.com>).

### **How do you find out what prerequisite courses are required for grad school?**

Contact the grad schools that you're interested in to get a full list of required courses. These can typically be found online or by calling an administrative faculty member. Many of the prerequisites for PT school and med school are the same: a year of general chemistry, physics, and biology (all with lab). Med school also requires organic chemistry with lab. PT programs require anatomy and physiology. Note: You don't have to go to grad school to become an ATC, but if you didn't get a four-year undergrad degree in athletic training, then you can go to a grad school and get your masters in athletic training to prepare for the board exam.

### **Who can you talk to find out more about these fields?**

At UCI dance faculty member Dr. Jeff Russell (PhD, ATC: [jeff.russell@uci.edu](mailto:jeff.russell@uci.edu)) is very approachable and knowledgeable. He is an ATC who helps to rehabilitate injured dancers. Jim Pluemer (PT, ATC: [jpluemer@uci.edu](mailto:jpluemer@uci.edu)), the Assistant Athletic Director of Sports Medicine at UCI, would also be a great person to contact. He runs the athletic training room in Crawford Hall and offers an internship for those interested in sports medicine, a field related to dance in many ways. This is my third year as an intern, and I have benefitted enormously from the internship. If you would like to learn more about a career in medicine, you should get in touch with Dr. David Kruse (MD, Sports Medicine Physician: [krused@uci.edu](mailto:krused@uci.edu)) or Dr. Mike Shepherd (MD, Orthopaedic Surgeon: [mshepard@uci.edu](mailto:mshepard@uci.edu)).

### **When should you take the GRE, MCAT, etc?**

This is easier said than done, but try VERY hard not to let this question stress you out. It has kept me up at night on more than one occasion. So if you're up at night worrying about standardized tests, you need to drink some DECAFFINATED tea, put on your flannel pj's, and grab your favorite teddy bear so you can get back to counting sheep. You need sleep! No use stressing out about being stressed out. Instead, take a test prep course and do practice tests on your own to prepare, but don't worry about it right now. One moment at a time, my friend.

### **Many grad schools prefer that prospective students do research. How are you going to do research as a dance major?**

Talk to Dr. Russell about this one. He has a research group of students who are currently working on research projects in dance science that relate to specific injuries, health problems, and rehabilitative techniques. I found that working with Dr. Russell is a great way to learn about how to do research and understand the results. This work is considered independent study, so you learn to work on your own or in a

small group of students as Dr. Russell mentors you. Once you do research, you can apply to present your findings at a dance science conference. This is a great way to gain research experience, learn about dance science, and bulk up your resume for PT and med school.

### **If you took some prerequisites at a community college, would grad schools look down on that?**

I've called many PT and med schools to ask the admissions staff this very question. They told me that they want prospective students to graduate from a four-year school, but that you can take all of the prerequisites at a community college without negative consequences. They understand that universities now have fewer classes due to budget cuts. These courses are fine as long as they are considered the equivalent to the ones that grad schools require. You can verify this using [assist.org](http://assist.org).

### **Do you want to work in the health field just for the money?**

No, this question offends me. I want to be a health care professional so I can decrease pain for injured dancers and help them get back to dancing. I enjoy movement and being active. So, helping someone regain their range of motion, balance, strength, or coordination would make me happy. ATCs, PTs, and doctors help patients achieve these goals. You may get paid more than a dancer, which is more financially practical for supporting a family, so this *is* a bonus.

### **Preparing for grad school and working toward an MA is not easy. Can you do this?**

I ask myself this one constantly! I often wonder if I will have the time, determination, and brains to do well in a wide range of difficult coursework. Many people believe that dancers are dumb bun-heads who can't handle the heavy course load required for admission into PT and medical school. I have to remind myself to think positively and remember that it's not true. Be your own cheerleader, and you will make it! Study hard and visualize success! Best of luck to you!

## ***Personal Journey: The Elephant in the Room***

*One dancer's journey living with an eating disorder and her recovery from anorexia nervosa.*

*by Stephanie Deere*

I was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa in May, 2009. I had struggled with food and my weight throughout middle school and high school, but when I began my second year of college, my behaviors became increasingly worse. I began to severely limit caloric intake and I followed an extremely strict set of dieting rules, losing a vast amount of weight. I thought about food the majority of the time, and I began to distrust my body, feeling that my hunger was an enemy. My lack of nourishment began to have grave consequences: I couldn't sleep – waking up hungry, I isolated myself in order to further focus on my diet. I experienced severe mood swings and anxiety, I began to alienate my family and friends, my body had difficulty healing from injuries, and I cared about nothing but my weight. Food was always the center of my thoughts and my body and self image was heavily distorted. One “slip” and I was on a downward spiral: over-exercising, restricting even more, feeling intensely angry at myself, at the world for not understanding, and at God for making me fat.

Eating disorders arise due to a variety of factors including one's interpersonal relationships, personality, environment, and genetic makeup. Cultural ideas about weight and body image can also influence an eating disorder, and today's focus on food, weight-loss, and the issue of obesity make it a battleground for individuals who are already at risk for such a disorder. Eating disorders develop as a response to many issues other than weight-loss. LeAnne Pleasant, a licensed clinical social worker who specializes in eating disorders, said that the disorder comes to fruition due to a set of “unrealistic assumptions and cognitive distortions that are used to gain a sense of safety, control, identity, and containment.”

Eating disorders often can be traced back to a desire to be thin. An individual begins a diet, and after the first month of losing weight, he or she realizes that the hard work is paying off. At

this point, however, weight-loss generally begins to plateau, causing the individual to become more restrictive on the diet, or increase exercise. This is when obsessive-compulsive or perfectionist tendencies can take hold. As the individual loses more weight, he or she begins to realize that this control helps with calming anxiety and serves as a self-soothing mechanism. Semi-starvation creates a “high” for the person, and positive feedback from others about the weight-loss further reinforces the behavior (Sacker 12-14). Weight-loss goals and extreme food/exercise control often continue until a serious eating disorder has taken hold. The eating disorder starts out as an innocent attempt to lose weight, but then begins to serve a greater purpose for the individual, and it consumes them.

Certain people are more prone to developing eating disorders based on specific traits they possess and specific psychological and environmental states experienced. Listed below are traits that are commonly found in individuals who suffer from eating disorders (Costin 73-75).

- Low self-esteem
- Diminished self-worth
- Belief in the thinness myth- The idea that thinness brings happiness
- Need for distraction
- Dichotomous (black-or-white) thinking
- Feelings of emptiness
- Quest for perfection
- Desire to be special or unique
- Need to be in control
- Need for power
- Desire for respect and admiration
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Need for escape or a safe place to go
- Lack of coping skills
- Lack of trust in self and others
- Terror of not measuring up

I experienced all of these traits, which made it possible for my eating disorder to take

root. I have always been a perfectionist, highly sensitive, and overly analytical. When I began college, I felt that I had lost my support system and had little trust in the people around me. I had a strong need to be perfect in school, difficulty expressing my feelings, and was fearful of not being accepted. My eating disorder provided the perfect solution to those problems. Ed, short for “Eating Disorder,” was a great distraction from my worries because I was always thinking about food and weight. Ed gave me complete control and power over my life, legitimized my self-worth, and made me feel special. Ed gave me a goal of attaining the perfect body, and fueled my black and white thinking – succeed or fail, and due to my perfectionism, I decided I would never fail. I hit every weight-loss goal. I thought I had complete control over my life and my body, and I made all of the decisions. What I didn’t realize was that Ed made all of the decisions.

Eating disorders have numerous physical consequences, and many negative psychological effects. Unfortunately, individuals with eating disorders are often not diagnosed in early stages and it continues to be a huge debilitating problem for many years. Many primary care physicians are untrained and inexperienced with respect to eating disorders and are unable to make the diagnosis. Patients who are diagnosed, however, usually enter a program with care from a medical doctor, a psychological professional, and a nutritional professional. Eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, night eating disorder, and eating disorders otherwise not specified. While all are extremely serious, I focus on anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (BN) since they are both more common in college students (Sim et al).

Anorexia nervosa is characterized by extremely low body weight, intense fear of weight-gain, and a great emphasis on weight in one’s self-evaluation. Studies suggest that the disorder affects approximately .5-1% of the population; however, 5% of college students meet the criteria for AN (Karp). According to Sim et al, oftentimes, individuals with AN have amenorrhea—loss of menstruation; osteopenia—

loss of bone density; and abnormal electrolyte levels. There are two subtypes of AN: the restricting subtype, where calorie restriction is the focus, and binge-eating/purging subtype, where individuals eat and then later purge the food from their bodies, with calorie restriction in between. Many individuals with the restriction subtype eventually begin binge-eating/purging behaviors, and approximately one third cross over to bulimia nervosa. Statistics regarding recovery from AN are bleak, with less than 85% of patients recovering fully, and most taking several years. Severe depression is a result of caloric deficiency, and suicide represents a number of deaths. (Sim et al). The mortality rate for AN is 10%: 27% die from suicide, 54% from a direct effect of the illness, and 19% from unknown causes (Karp).

One to one and a half percent of the population suffers from bulimia nervosa with 19% of college women and 5% of college men experiencing some bulimic symptoms (Karp). There are two subtypes of BN: the purging subtype where individuals binge and then perform compensatory behavior such as vomiting, or the taking of laxatives, and the non-purging type, where individuals react to bingeing by over-exercising or strict dieting. BN patients are often at a normal body weight, but also have intense fear of weight-gain, and often times have electrolyte disturbances, abrasions on hands and throat, and erosion of dental enamel due to vomiting. While crossover from AN to BN is common, the reverse is quite rare (Sim et al).

Assessing an eating disorder requires a detailed look at many behavioral and psychological aspects of the individual. According to Costin, health-care professionals and therapists begin the assessment by acquiring preliminary information such as the patient’s name, age, etc, why the patient is seeking help, and information about the patient’s family dynamics and psychological history. The next step is to look at family patterns of diet and exercise, and then the client explains his/her own eating and diet history. Clients need to identify their support systems, and articulate a recovery goal. However, client goals are often extremely different from clinician goals and at this point the

clinician needs to determine how much the disorder is affecting the client. The clinician then does assessments of psychiatric and medical history, history of substance abuse, history of physical or sexual abuse, and the patient's overall insight into their problem. After this process has been completed, the clinician is able to make a diagnosis (Costin 99-109).

If a patient is diagnosed with an eating disorder, it is important to begin a recovery program immediately. Many patients must be admitted to an inpatient program if they are high-risk for severe health problems. Other patients are placed in out-patient treatment where they spend several hours every day at a center. Some individuals simply attend regular therapy, nutritionist, and health-care professional appointments. Eating disorder patients are often medicated for issues such as depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder in order to provide some relief from the daunting eating disorder thoughts (Costin 111-129). Therapists need to address the many issues of the eating disordered patient while moving through the stages of recovery. To be fully recovered, individuals must be psychologically healthy as well as behaviorally and physically healthy. Clients who leave treatment once they have established healthy behaviors, but before the psychological self has fully recovered, have a high likelihood of relapse and continue to struggle with the eating disorder. However, full recovery is possible (Bardone-Cone et al).

Although I was diagnosed in May, I did not begin a recovery program until August. My parents and I knew little of the severity of my disorder, and we had trouble finding a recovery program that suited my needs. After we had found a good fit, I had weekly appointments with both my counselor, LeAnne Pleasant, and a registered dietician, Lisa Licovoli. LeAnne helped me through my battles with Ed, while Lisa focused on my nutrition and ensured that my weight was stabilized. Having to relinquish all control of my eating and what my body looked like was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I was angry at everyone, I hated the meal plans, I hated the constant negative thoughts about my weight-

gain, I hated having to look at myself and my life and give up my obsession with food and weight. I experienced several relapses, and many times I felt as though I just wanted to give up. While I am still in recovery, and must focus to stay on track, I now know that my eating disorder was a trap and it only leads to anger, loneliness, and eventually, death. I plan on one day being a fully-recovered individual and, while I know how hard it will be to get there, the support I have received from family, friends, and my recovery team has showed me that it is a tangible goal and I will reach it.

The Eating Disorder Sourcebook, written by Carolyn Costin, has several suggestions for ways to help prevent eating disorders. According to Costin, one of the best ways is to educate oneself about the warning signs and symptoms of an eating disorder. If people are more aware of these signs, then eating disorders will be easier to detect. Another important way to improve the environment eating disorders thrive in is to be open to discussing matters concerning food and weight with others. Because the topic of eating disorders is so taboo, many individuals never mention their obstacles with food and weight. These issues are extremely common, so in talking about them more openly, we can help the stigma regarding eating disordered behavior. The Eating Disorder Sourcebook has a "Checklist of Observable and Nonobservable Signs of an Eating Disorder" that one can use to verify concerns regarding someone's behavior (Costin 86-87).

- Does anything to avoid hunger and eating and feels guilty after eating
- Is obsessive and preoccupied with food
- Eats large quantities of food secretly and/or eats when upset
- Counts calories obsessively
- Disappears into the bathroom after eating (probably to vomit food)
- To lose weight takes diuretics, diet pills, laxatives, enemas, ipecac, and so forth
- Must earn food through exercising or exercises as punishment for overeating
- Is preoccupied with fat in food and on the body

- Increasingly eliminates food groups and/or eats only nonfat or “diet” foods
- Becomes a vegetarian but also avoids nuts, cheese, pasta and many other foods
- Displays rigid control around food (e.g., type, quantity, and timing of food eaten)
- Complains of being pressured by others to eat more or less
- Weighs obsessively, panics without a scale, is terrified of gaining weight
- Isolates him/herself socially
- Substitutes sweets or alcohol for other nutritious foods
- Constantly needs reassurance regarding appearance, self-denigrating
- Constantly checks the fit of a belt, a bracelet, a ring, or “thin” clothes
- Checks size of thighs when sitting and space between thighs when standing
- Uses large amounts of coffee, diet drinks, caffeine pills, or other stimulants

There are many ways in which college students can help themselves with regard to disordered eating. One way is to become educated about healthy eating and exercise habits. Many students neglect their nutrition, which can lead to a snowball effect of unhealthy living habits. Individuals should also refrain from criticizing their bodies. Negative emphasis on one’s body and looks affirms the idea that what matters most is what we see. Instead, individuals need to put more emphasis on health, being able to perform well, and developing one’s inner self and interpersonal relationships. Another way to help prevent eating disorders is to ensure a balance between work activities and free time. Perfectionist individuals who are strongly motivated are high profile for developing eating disorders due to their heightened stress levels. In today’s busy society, it can be extremely difficult to find time for one’s self, so pencil free time into your planner. Healthy balance in life is the best way to prevent eating disorders and other illnesses.

#### Resources:

- Stephanie Deere: Diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa in May 2009, (562) 481-6459, sdeere@uci.edu

- LeAnne Pleasant: Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Clinical Hypnotherapist, located in Newport Beach, CA (949) 812-9785, Leanne@pleasanttherapy.com, www.pleasanttherapy.com
- Lisa Licavoli: Registered Dietician, Board Certified Clinical Nutritionist, Co-author of Love Your Body: Change the Way You Feel About the Body You Have, located in Newport Beach, CA (949) 646-484  
Centers for eating disorder recovery:
- The Victorian House of Newport Beach Eating Disorder Treatment, (800) 647-0042, www.eatingdisordertreatment.com
- Center For Discovery and Adolescent Change located in Lakewood, Downey, La Habra, Long Beach, Menlo Park, Whittier, CA (800) 760-3934 www.centerfordiscovery.com, contactus@centerfordiscovery.com
- Rebecca’s House: Eating Disorder Solutions located in Lake Forest, CA (800) 711-2062 www.rebeccashouse.org
- Monte Nido: located in Malibu, CA (310) 457-9958 <http://www.montenido.com>
- Montecatini: located in La Costa, CA (760) 436-8930 www.montecatinieatingdisorder.com
- Sierra Tucson: located in Tucson, AZ (800) 842-4487 www.SierraTucson.com
- Rain Rock: located in Springfield, OR (310) 457-9958 www.rainrock.org rtc@rainrock.org
- Rosewood: located in Wickenburg, AZ (928) 684-9594 www.rosewoodranch.com
- Carolina House: (866) 690-7240 www.carolinaeatingdisorders.com www.crchealth.com
- Center for Hope of the Sierras: located in Reno, NV (775) 828-4949 info@centerforhopeofthesierras.com, www.centerforhopeofthesierras.com
- Center for Change: located in Orem, UT (801) 224-8255 info@centerforchange.com www.centerforchange.com

Further Reading:



- The Eating Disorder Sourcebook: A Comprehensive Guide to the Causes, Treatments, and Prevention of Eating Disorders by: Carolyn Costin, Third Edition
- Life Without Ed: How One Woman Declared Independence from Her Eating Disorder and How You Can Too by: Jenni Schaefer, Ambassador of the National Eating Disorder Association with Thom Rutledge
- Goodbye Ed, Hello Me: Recover from Your Eating Disorder and Fall in Love with Life by: Jenni Schaefer
- Regaining Your Self: Understanding and Conquering The Eating Disorder Identity by: Ira M. Sacker with Sheila Buff

#### Information Websites:

- [AndreasVoice.org](http://AndreasVoice.org)- Information about Andrea's Voice Foundation (Andrea died in her sleep after an electrolyte disturbance from struggling with bulimia nervosa)
- [Bulimia.com](http://Bulimia.com)- information and links
- [EatingDisorderInfo.org](http://EatingDisorderInfo.org)- hotline numbers and referrals for treatment
- [EDReferral.com](http://EDReferral.com)- Referrals to facilities, specialists, support groups, etc.
- [NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://NationalEatingDisorders.org) (800) 931-2237 – Referrals, information, links to associations etc.

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## ***Personal Journey: Why do I still Dance? Because I'm a Dancer***

*How do you recover from a traumatic experience? Sometimes, being in the studio can help.*

*by Jacquelyn Castillo*

I was put in my first ballet class when I was three years old and I've been in love with dance for as long as I can remember. I was fascinated by the way my play tutu floated up around me when I learned how to do chaîné turns across the floor, I was proud of the blisters I had earned with my first pair of pointe shoes, and loved how I felt like a woman when I did my first pas de deux. For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to be a professional dancer, and I would have done anything to make that happen—but during my freshman year of college all of that changed.

Two months after I entered UCI as a dance major, I was drugged at a fraternity party and was raped by my boyfriend's friend. For anyone that knows about rape, it is common for victims to feel like it is somehow their fault, and that was true for me too. I was convinced that I had put myself in a situation that was asking for trouble; I was drunk, dressed the way freshman girls typically do on Friday nights, and dancing up a storm at the party while very aware of the attention of the men in the room. Before I was raped, dance was my life, the reason I woke up in the morning, and the food for my soul that defined who I was as a person. After, I feared the dance studio. I felt like I was putting my body on display, and I couldn't look myself in the mirror. Ashamed and overwhelmed with confusing emotions after my assault, I didn't tell one person about it for nine months, and it took me two years to seek help.

I struggled through my classes, and quickly became more involved in the party scene than in dance. I eventually stopped going to dance classes altogether, was put on academic probation, withdrew from the university, lost touch with my family, and ended up in outpatient rehab for cocaine and alcohol abuse. In a short two years, my life had completely transformed into something I didn't recognize. I hadn't taken a dance class for almost a year and had no time to

because I was working three jobs to support myself; I knew I needed to get back into school.

I started working through my issues with a therapist in San Diego, taking online classes through a community college, and squeezing one dance class in a week, but it was not enough. I still didn't feel like myself and going to only one class a week when I hadn't danced in a year was very hard on my body. I wasn't doing well in school because I was spending all of my time at work, and I still had no time for dance, so I came to the conclusion that going back to UCI would be the best thing for me. Now that I was healthy again, I needed to continue on the path that I had started and still wanted; I needed to face my fears and finish my degree at the school that I had chosen. So, I took out student loans, got a job in Irvine, and re-enrolled in the university.

Even though I was glad to be back in the dance studio, it was hard to walk the halls of UCI again. All of my old memories and emotions came rushing back to me, but in the dance studio, as soon as the music started and I did my first plié, I could forget about everything and just be a dancer again. However, I was having a hard time getting through a class and not getting discouraged by my lack of technique. My muscles were tight and weak and my extension was nowhere near what it used to be. I had to ignore the little voice in my head that was scolding me for only doing a double pirouette when I used to be able to do triples with no problem. I needed just to focus on getting through the whole class. I was mad at myself for letting my technique go and leaving dance in the midst of my life's obstacles because now, coming back to the dance studio, it not only hurt emotionally but it also hurt physically because my body was completely out of shape. It wasn't easy to get back into shape. I pushed myself hard, too hard at times because of my frustration and ended up badly injuring a muscle in my groin.

I didn't know how to take it easy in class. I was so mad that my technique wasn't what I wanted it to be, and so frustrated with my injury which kept me from doing the entire class, that I kept re-injuring it. Every few months my leg would get slightly better, and then I would pull it again when I pushed myself too hard. I had to take a step back and look at why I was back in school, and more importantly why I was dancing again. At this point in my life, I'm not working towards becoming a professional dancer anymore. But saying it and convincing myself that it was OK were two different battles. I had to realize that I am a dancer whether I am performing on stage or not. And it's OK to not want to be a professional dancer anymore, even though that was what I was working for in my adolescence. I can love dance just as much with my extension at ninety-degrees as I did when it was higher because I'm doing it for different reasons now. Now, in class, I have to take it easy, being careful not to push my extension too hard before I'm warm so that I don't re-injure my leg. Instead of working toward perfecting my technique, I'm dancing because I love it and just focused on getting through the class.

Being able to dance is a gift. Most people cannot begin to understand the serenity we can achieve with the daily ritual of starting with pliés at the ballet barre. They'll never comprehend the mind-body-soul connection you can feel in a good modern class, or the rush of adrenalin that pushes us across the floor in grande allegro. My entire life before college, I had wanted to sell my car, move to New York, and try to make it as a dancer. But now I wanted dance in my life, not as a career, but rather, as a means of self-preservation; I needed dance to feel complete, because I am a dancer.

In a related book that I read entitled Dancing for Health: Conquering and Preventing

Stress, author Judith Lynne Hanna discusses dance as a means to resist, reduce, and escape stress. We all know that exercise in general increases endorphins, norepinephrine, and serotonin levels in the brain, which aid with depression. Rhythmic motions of aerobic exercise may trigger mechanisms similar to centering devices used in meditation. Research suggests that tension reduction following dance exercise specifically lasts longer than other forms of therapy like distraction and meditation. Dancing can give one a sense of self-mastery and contribute to a positive self-perception and body image. When I was struggling with that after my assault, dance healed me. It helped me re-connect with myself and re-establish my self-esteem.

I find when talking to other students here at UCI, as well as some friends from dance back at my hometown, that there are so many dancers who are stuck in a rut like I was. For one reason or another, their paths have been interrupted and their focus on dance has changed. Many have realized that they realistically will probably not be professional dancers as they had hoped in high school, so they've lost motivation and become depressed. I think it's important as life throws you obstacles to not be discouraged and give up, because we, as dancers, need dance in our lives to feel alive. As priorities change and paths get interrupted, you must also alter your expectations of how dance is going to factor into your life and make the most of it. My path was changed drastically because of what I went through, but what I've come to realize is that even though I don't want to dance professionally anymore, I'm still a dancer, and no one can take that away from me. Dancers are dancers whether they are on stage or not, because the love for the art form connects the body to the soul.

## Thoughts on Nudity in Dance

*When dancers wear nothing, does this work as a costume?*

*by Justin Keats*

When it comes to nudity in dance, Deborah Jowitt, a dance historian and longtime critic for the *Village Voice*, practically says it all in the title of her 1972 review of “Mutations,” by Glen Tetley and Hans van Manen: “You Can’t Choreograph a Penis.” She is right. There are very few ways a penis can be controlled while a dancer is naked. What I didn’t expect was the way a critic could notice that detail. Jowitt found it “heartening, especially in this plethora of controlled dynamics, to see that the penis refuses to be choreographed” (41).

Now, I would never consider myself to be conservative, and I can understand what a wonderful juxtaposition the clean lines and controlled bodies of dancers can provide for an uncontrolled body part. But it didn’t work that way for me when I saw Dandy Lion Dance Company perform an excerpt from “Don’t Suck” last October. I began to question the way nudity in dance was used. After all, asking a dancer to be naked is not the same as asking them to wear a costume. So I find myself wondering, what warrants the use of nudity? When is it effective?

In “Don’t Suck,” two men, wearing only neckties, walk onto a lit stage, shake hands, and take a step away from each other. Then the smaller of the two leaps at the taller man, crotch first; they fall to the floor on impact, stand up, shake hands again and collapse to the floor, with forced and painful smiles on their faces the entire time. The five-minute piece ends with a third dancer, female and fully clothed, wearing 4- or 5-inch wedge platforms, black shorts, and a sparkly tank top, entering the space as if she were a vulture waiting for the remains. She and the smaller of the two unclothed figures leave, while the larger one remains until the lights blackout.

My first reaction to this piece was one question. Why? Why did there need to be nudity? For me, it did nothing for the minimal dancing that occurred. In fact it was more of a distraction from the dancing than anything else. There were

no beautiful lines or controlled bodies to contrast with the uncontrollable penis. It seemed to be used as a way to shock the audience, which the choreographer had mentioned was part of his intent. In that way it was successful, but I think nudity can do much more for a piece than simply shock or juxtapose.

Wishing to explore this thought, I began searching for and watching dances that contained nudity on YouTube. I asked myself three questions as I watched each one:

- Was the nudity male, female, or both?
- Was the nudity necessary?
- Was the nudity effective?

These questions enabled me to figure out when I find nudity to be a well-used choreographic tool, and when I find it to be extraneous or a distraction. I found three choreographic works that used nudity well. The first is “Re- (I, II, II)” by Shen Wei. The second is “Bella Figura” by Jiri Kylian. The Third is “Rite of Spring” by Angelin Preljocaj.

I think these dances used nudity well because it wasn’t used purely for shock value. There was a more creative reason, either thematically or narratively, for the choreographer to ask the dancers to, in some cases literally, strip themselves of costumes. In Shen Wei’s piece, the dancers were not fully nude but topless. The movement was very composed, and the dancers were painted to look like Roman statues underneath bright lights. To me it was a celebration of the athletic body—an amazing show of how beautiful the human body is, not through a sexual lens, but as an appreciation of our structures and the great details that create individualism. I think this was the most aesthetically pleasing example of nudity.

In the Kylian piece, the dancers also are topless, but here the nudity goes farther than just celebrating the beauty of the body. It also acts as a gender neutralizer. I realize it is a strange concept to think that having both men and women

topless is a gender neutralizer, but what I mean is that not having just the men topless makes it an even playing field. All are topless and therefore all are equals, both in costume and movement. There was no separation between genders, and this allowed me as a viewer to appreciate all the bodies on stage. It removed gender roles so well it actually took me a moment to realize that there were both men and women on stage. I think that if it was Kylian's goal to create this neutralizing effect, that nudity was the only way to get it. The lack of tops showed that there was nothing to hide, that the human body, male or female, is something that can be celebrated and does not need to be hidden—simply beautiful figures moving on stage, as the title implies.

The only piece I thought used full nudity effectively was Angelin Preljocaj's "Rite of Spring," in which women appear unclothed. It was one of the only times I felt that nudity was the best choreographic choice. In "Rite of Spring" sex is a main theme. In the first scene all the women walk onstage in short skirts and slip their underwear off in front of the watching men. The whole piece builds from there to the final scene in which they sacrifice a virgin, as is traditional in *Rite of Spring*. In the final scene a single woman is thrown onto a mound of grass center stage and stripped of her clothing. She is then forced by the circling others to dance herself to death. Stripping this single dancer in front of the audience does a lot for the narrative. Since the removal of underwear in the first scene, the dance progressed, with more and more clothing removed. With this amount of sexual tension building, the only way to continue is full nudity. In my opinion, had they torn off her clothes to reveal a unitard, it wouldn't have been a realistic victimization in a world ruled by sexual games. The nudity in this piece was not only effective but absolutely necessary to the plot and power of the work.

The other three dances I watched were not as successful at using nudity—or at least their attempts didn't work for me. The lack of costume seemed used mostly for shock value, as in the work by Dandyllion Dance Company. It isn't that shock value isn't exciting, but with nudity, a

shocked response usually pulls your audience away from actually concentrating on the dance. For me at least, I find that when nudity is used to shock me, I get fixated on the fact that the dancers are naked and don't concentrate on the actual movement or themes or narrative in a dance. Looking back and looking past the nudity in "Don't Suck," I can see that the scenario was loaded with an unlimited array of interpretations. But as a viewer I could only see naked bodies and could only feel uncomfortable watching them interact. Even though there was possibly something more behind the movement, it was lost because of the way the nudity was presented.

Another example of a naked shock came from Jon Fabre and his work titled "Quando L'uomo Principale e una Donna." In this female solo, the dancer hangs bottles of alcohol from the ceiling, empties them, strips herself of her clothing and does wildly fast and intricate floor work spraying liquid everywhere and sliding her body across the stage. This movement is highly interesting to watch, and I liked the way Fabre explored how a slick dance floor can open up a new realm of movement. Perhaps it would have been more appreciated had he not had his dancer spread her legs open towards the audience and rub her genitals in a sexual tease before the floor sequence. Using movement that mimics masturbation is rarely explored in dance. I give credit to Fabre for being bold enough to take his movement to such a realistic place. However, it is slightly too pornographic for me to feel comfortable analyzing it as I would any other gestures, especially since there is no room for personal interpretation of the gesture. Had she been wearing clothes it would have said something very different, I think. It might still have been an ineffective gesture, but at least it wouldn't have made me as an audience member feel, for lack of a better term, icky.

Not all the pieces I have lumped into the "poorly used nudity" category were as easy to put there as the two above were. I went back and forth with "Untitled," by Pilobolus. In this dance two men are underneath the long dresses of two women who sit on their shoulders, giving the illusion that these two women are giantesses. In

the middle of the dance, the giant women seem to give birth to the men who were holding them up. The men are “birthed” from underneath the women’s dresses and are completely naked. It definitely accomplishes the comedic effect it seemed to be attempting. However, I simply found that the nudity was unnecessary. The dance and the image of the two men being birthed were strong enough that I didn’t need them to be nude for it to be humorous. Although I understand the dilemma of what to costume these two men in, I can’t help but think that there could have been a better costume than nudity. Nudity leads to so many personally disturbing thoughts such as, “Wow, they have been nude under those dresses for a long time.” Or, “I wonder how the women felt about having their colleagues naked underneath them and lifting them?” And lastly, “Is nudity actually considered a costume?”

This last question stirs a lot of thoughts in me. Whenever I see a naked dancer I always think of how much mental preparation they have to undergo to feel confident enough to walk out on stage naked, because unlike wearing tights or leotards or unitards, there is nothing hiding your physical body. As an audience member I can see more than their figures and shape outline; I can see their skin, their scars, birthmarks, genitals, hair, everything. Nothing is left unseen. Nothing is hidden. It’s these thoughts that make me want a real reason for there to be nudity. Because it is completely exposing a person, it isn’t something that I think a choreographer can ask for on a whim because they think it will be an interesting effect or a good way to shock the audience, or because it will be humorous.

As a dancer I would only be naked onstage if I felt that it was the best choice of costuming for a piece and that all other costume options had been tried to get the point across. Unlike a costume, I wouldn’t be able to simply take it off after the performance. Hypothetically, I

would be willing to do the part of the virgin in “Rite of Spring,” because the nudity was in my mind warranted and properly used. However, I would not be willing to be in Pilobolus’s “Untitled” and have people laugh at the fact that I am naked. It doesn’t seem a legitimate enough reason.

In my viewing, I couldn’t help but notice that there wasn’t a single example of male nudity in a dance that I found enjoyable as a viewer. From what little I did see, it was always used as a shock or comic relief factor and never to move a narrative forward. It also brings me back to Deborah Jowitt and the idea that you can’t choreograph the penis. There are those who will think that perhaps I’m forgetting that breasts can’t be controlled either; however breasts do not change shape or move nearly as much as a penis does. In a dance belt, it is shaped and more or less stationary. Out of a dance belt, it is just a distraction. With apologies to Ms. Jowitt, it is not the kind of juxtaposition I am interested in watching.

The only time I have ever heard of the penis being actually choreographed is by Puppetry of the Penis, which debuted in 1998. They are a group of men who are self-acclaimed “professionals of genital origami,” and although they are technically choreographing their genitals by using their hands to create clever shapes, such as hamburgers and fruit bats, they are not choreographing dance works.

This brings me to my final point. Choreographing a good piece with nudity is a challenge. To some choreographers, it may be an interesting challenge, especially if it involves the untamable penis, and I say, by all means, try. However, consider using it not as a tool for pure shock value or humor but to further your piece in an honorable and honest manner. I know I for one would be a much happier viewer.

#### Works Cited

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# **The Case for the Dance Major: Dance as a Legitimate Academic Discipline in Today's University**

*by Laura Obler*

Most dance majors have experienced the frustration of needing to legitimize their major. Questions such as, “What are you going to do with that degree?” and “Well, do you study anything else?” are commonly asked. These questions sometimes lead dance students to double major in a more “legitimate” discipline in order to validate their university career and produce a viable resumé. For whatever reason, there is a stigma associated with majoring in dance at the university, one that is not necessarily applied to other art forms. Few of the nation’s most prestigious academic institutions, such as the Ivy Leagues, have dance majors, but almost all have music and theater majors. Something about studying dance makes it appear to be less academic, and therefore less worthy of being a primary study area. This bias, however, is unwarranted. Just as in any other art, dance requires an extreme amount of discipline and dedication in the studio, and it also has a rich history and a large body of academic literature associated with it. Furthermore, similar to any liberal arts discipline, the dance major is a comprehensive package that effectively equips its graduates for life after college, teaching them how to think critically and creatively.

In today’s world, where few people use their university degrees in their occupation, the college diploma is not meant to provide vocational training. That is what professional schools and trade schools do. The university degree is made up of courses that teach critical thinking skills and introduce students to a variety of ideas centered on a chosen topic. Students are intended to learn from faculty mentors and each other, foster their own research projects, and learn how to communicate their ideas. After college, when they enter the work force, they then apply those broad skills to whatever job they obtain.

The dance major, specifically the UC Irvine dance major, satisfies all of the above criteria. It is a complete, multi-dimensional

package that trains students not only to become professional dancers, but also to be critical thinkers, community members, and researchers. It also teaches students other career skills, such as creative problem solving and stage presence, perhaps more effectively than most other majors.

Requirements for the dance major at UCI can be split into two different types: conservatory style studio courses and academic classroom courses. Conservatory classes include movement theory and techniques, such as ballet, modern, jazz, choreography, and repertory. Academic classes include textbooks and desks—lectures in dance history, kinesiology, and Labanotation are examples. Both types of courses are integral to the major, and both types impart applicable skills to the dance students.

The academic courses are the easiest to argue for in terms of intellectual value. Dancers are asked to learn facts, read essays, and write critically. These include interdisciplinary areas of study that lead to careers related to dance, but do not involve actual dancing. There are six faculty members in the dance department that teach classes of this sort, in dance theory and history, kinesiology and dance science, dance notation, musical resources, and motion capture. Classes in these subjects are required for all dance majors, and additional electives and independent research projects can also be explored. These academic subjects clearly meet the expectations of a university study plan. Within them students are taught to write effectively and present their ideas. They involve study, research, and critical analysis. The only difference from courses in other majors is that the analysis is applied to topics within and related to dance.

The conservatory style courses are more difficult to place within the university setting. On the surface, they appear to be purely mechanical and therefore vocational. It is true that in these course dancers hone their technical skills. They become more aware of their bodies and the actual

practice of the art form. However, this is not unlike a music student practicing his or her instrument for hours a day, which is considered appropriate university work. One obvious benefit of conservatory dance courses is physical prowess; however, it is not the only outcome. These classes also have intellectual value. Students have to learn quickly, adapt to new teachers and surroundings, work with each other in groups, and think critically. These courses work not only the neck down but also demand significant brainpower.

One major skill required in any occupational or academic setting is the ability to communicate ideas effectively. Learning how to communicate ideas in dance begins with being able to produce clear steps and movement; then it evolves into communicating thoughts and opinions. Dancers are expected to think critically about their steps. Effective communication of movement requires a decided purpose and approach to each movement. In class, dancers are often prompted to voice those decisions and ideas publicly, to ensure thoughtful dancing.

The most pertinent example of learning to communicate ideas is in a choreographic study. UCU dance majors are asked to do choreographic studies in almost all technique courses and are also required to take choreography class. There, students develop ideas and practice making dances that effectively convey those ideas to the world. They have to consider how the audience will respond to certain movements, formations, pauses, and music. Motifs and patterns are analyzed for their effectiveness. The ability to see patterns and how the audience will register movements is beneficial for anyone giving speeches, because so much of the effectiveness of a speech is visual, through gesture and body language.

In addition to clarity of communication, choreographers have to develop original movement sequences and approaches. The process of creating art requires a deep understanding of human behavior and the world in which we live. Creativity is a skill that is not encouraged by many majors, but it is highly valued and practiced within the dance major. In a

professional or academic setting, there is always a need for people who have original ways of approaching ideas, and choreography class teaches the skill of problem solving through new ideas. This is one area where the dance major excels over others because students learn to cultivate original thoughts. Choreographic studies challenge students to decide which messages they want to convey to the world. Not only are students forced to be original, but also they are forced to deliver intelligible presentations of those ideas.

Another skill that is developed in dance students is stage presence. Whether performing their own choreography or another person's, dance students are continually showing work in front of others. They are evaluated at all stages of the process—including final stage works in which students are peer-reviewed. This process of constant performing trains students to be comfortable sharing ideas in formal and informal settings. Stage fright is generally eliminated or at least controlled. This is useful in any profession. Leaders in all fields must be capable of presenting in front of colleagues or laymen. If one cannot share their work, it is meaningless. Other majors, such as those in the sciences, do not offer opportunities to present. Students sit in lectures, study alone at home, and then are anonymously evaluated through written tests. Unlike the dance major, they seldom have the pressure of presenting to a group.

Although the dance major provides vocational training, it also includes equal emphasis on intellectual exploration. The fact that it is an effective vocational training does not diminish its academic value. Instead, the major should be more respected for its ability to be both academic and vocational. The major fosters creativity, originality, and confidence, while also expanding the students' knowledge base of history, kinesiology, academic writing, and repertory. Taken as a whole, this major is a complete package that has relevance in today's world, and any student who chooses to pursue it will be well equipped for any professional challenge, be it dancing, academia, or another profession.

## Us versus Them

*Should the hip-hop world and the university dance department try to understand each other? What would happen if they did?*

*by Jonah Aki*

You would have had to be hiding under a rock not to be exposed to the immense cultural wave known as hip-hop. Hip-hop has become a culture, one that is expressed in many ways, but especially through dance. The movement that we see on television shows, music videos, and even staged productions is not even a fraction of its reach, yet it has us mesmerized. But there seems to be resistance in accepting hip-hop dance as a legitimate form in a university setting. This resistance can be felt strongly by hip-hop dancers who try to dip their toes in more classical styles without prior training. They not only face the many challenges of unfamiliar dance forms, many of them sense disapproval, maybe because there are so many misconceptions about hip-hop dancers in the dance world.

Hip-hop dancers might find themselves asking whether they should even try to master forms taught in university dance departments. What will it be like trying to break into the world of more traditional dance styles with only a hip-hop background? How can hip-hop become more accepted? Does university dance teaching benefit the genre?

With dance becoming popular in mainstream media, many start studying it with the goal of fame and fortune. It's cool and "in" to be a dancer because of the media, and some decide to become professionals. So what constitutes a professional dancer? Does only being in a ballet or modern company make you a professional? And are you bound to study only one field? The answer to these questions is no. Hip-hop dancers should expand their knowledge through the use of other genres to learn essential dance information. Take, for example, the story of Robert Tsai, a 25-year-old Chapman University graduate. Although American born, Rob spent his adolescent years in Taiwan before moving back to the States in late 2003. All of his training had been strictly breaking, i.e. breakdancing/ b-boying, which is

considered the original dance form of hip-hop. It wasn't until his junior year of high school that he took his first "official" dance class, and not until his second year of college did he decide to take his dance career seriously.

All of a sudden, Rob was thrown into this unfamiliar world. Ballet, modern, and jazz faced him every day, and it was tough to embrace the changes. "It was extremely difficult because it was completely different from what I'm used to," he said when I interviewed him. "I had to find a new body awareness." His breaking training didn't include what we would expect in a class, as it was mostly freestyle based. "One of the hardest things [was] moving from the core or, just learning how to initiate movement from all different parts of the body," he exclaimed. Rob began to learn that technical styles didn't involve just a set of placed arm and leg movements. There is an internal connection to all the limbs, and he needed to learn proprioception to detect that for himself. "Breaking is all gestural," he said. "It involves making a lot of lewd gestures at your opponent. Modern and ballet though—it's very postural. You have to stop thinking about what you are doing and more about how you are doing it." He did say however that learning all the dance terms wasn't hard for him at all. "That part was just like learning to swim. I was thrown in the pool, and I was just forced to pick it up."

And so he began his journey into the world of technical dance, but as expected, he was met with much criticism. Opposition to his plight began to come at him left and right, but he believes that it was unintentional. The fact is, however, it was still there. Rob was met with negative comments and an unwelcoming attitude, especially once his dance background had been revealed. That attitude can be translated as, "What are you doing here?" or "Why aren't you better at this?" His aspirations for dancing on a professional level were met with negative

responses from peers such as, “Dude, there is no way.” He says he had similar discouragement from teachers as well. Everyone in Rob’s department had been dancing since their youth, and here he was starting at age 20. It seems, however, that more than just his inexperience became an issue. It could be that negative stereotypes about his label as a “hip-hop dancer” were the cause.

What are the misconceptions about hip-hop dance in our academic world? I believe that the animosity towards the hip-hop genre originates mainly from misinformation. Some may believe that hip-hop does not have a strong history or doesn’t have an ordered set of fundamental ideals. Technical styles like ballet and modern have a deep historical background that was shaped over time to incorporate many different elements. With respect to the time it has taken for ballet to evolve, and considering the young age of the hip-hop genre, it already is grounded in a strong foundation. Ballet originated in the royal courts, whereas hip-hop dance developed as the natural response to the growing urban unrest and social organization of the later 1900s while incorporating different cultural dance aspects of the people that practiced it. So it is misinformation that would make us think that hip-hop dance does not have a deep-rooted system including its own technique and history. Hip-hop dancers praise the individual as well and display a strong support for personal style and variety. It also has proved to be very adaptable, evolving to incorporate a plethora of elements.

Fortunately for Rob, dancing at Chapman University has greatly influenced his hip-hop dancing in a positive way. Choreographic ideas such as repetition, shape flow, space and time are now all under his belt. The technical practice of modern and ballet can now be applied to the way

he practices his own style, helping his breaking on a technical level. He learned about flexibility and strength and discovered how he can “break down each move.” He stated, “Technical dance styles are codified, making it easy to break down and take in small chunks. This doesn’t really happen in breaking, so the ability to break down my own movement has helped me to greatly improve.”

So it’s easy to see that hip-hop dancers are able to adapt and evolve by mastering other technique styles. But how can ballet and modern dancers benefit from hip-hop training? Generally hip-hop dance can help you stay more grounded and loosen up different body parts, providing a feeling of agility that would aid in any dancer’s practice. Hip-hop has come to be known for its isolations and precision, which are useful for the execution of modern and jazz movement. Your connection to the music and energy flow can also greatly improve. Hip-hop mainly offers, however, an aesthetic difference from the rest. It is a unique way of moving and thinking and feeling, a way you’d have to experience to believe. It is exciting, new, and different in a positive way and dancers would only gain from what it can provide.

The experience that hip-hop dancers have in a university setting is definitely unique. Even with the hardships that come with being so new to the traditional world, hip-hop dancers should definitely consider a university dance education. And the university dance community needs to start seeing more hip-hop dancers and what they have to offer. The misconceptions that each community has about the other need to be addressed, so that we can all benefit. Together we can build a better community and work towards creating an atmosphere of unity and respect between all dance forms.

## **Cognitive Approaches and Investing in Sensation Define Today's Contemporary Dance**

*Why going "Gaga" is one of the thinking dancer's best alternatives.*

*by Shane Scopatz*

This fall, I started asking myself how the modern/contemporary dance form has evolved. What is different about the way people are dancing today compared to how people were dancing 20-25 years ago? My summer journeys to dance and watch dance abroad and in the States have contributed to the way I now think about it. During the summer of 2010 I had the great fortune of traveling to Israel, where I would noodle around in a studio before class, listening to Hebrew and heavily accented English, and thinking about how amazing it was that I made it to Tel Aviv. I took many open classes there in a relatively new contemporary technique called Gaga. The technique was created by choreographer, Ohad Naharin and focuses on awareness of the body through experience and sensation. As you might imagine the heat in Israel was on the cusp of being unbearable. I remember a moment when my thoughts were interrupted by a humorous comment about how hot it was. A man in conversation with a friend aptly said, "It's going to be like Bikram Gaga." It was over 100 degrees in the studio, yet everyone was excited to be there.

Like the Gaga classes I have taken in the States, the class was an hour long and we never stopped moving. The teacher led the class through exercises where we connected with ideas and images. We practiced discovering what it was like to float, or to have our bones massage our skin from the inside. Each exercise was designed to build on the one before, so by the end of the hour our minds and bodies were so full of sensation that it almost felt like a recreational high. It is interesting to me that using the mind in such a methodical way can shape and season movement.

Shaping movement by actively using the brain is a concept I have experienced a lot in my research of contemporary dance. During my

summer research in '09 and '10 I took classes and saw performances in the cities of Tel Aviv, San Francisco, and New York. I grew immensely from these experiences and continue to discover new things in my ongoing practice here at UCI. As I recalled some of my past experiences from these two summers I started finding common threads between the way people were working. I realized that the modern/contemporary genre has evolved into a form invested in cognitively thinking about movement in a specific way. It's different from previous incarnations of modern dance in that the thinking done today emphasizes an exploration of experience based on imagery and sensation, rather than the more typical model of emphasizing the external body or an emotional investment. The most concrete evidence of this evolution is the codification of techniques that are built with the intention of unifying the way a dancer utilizes imagery and sensation.

There are two big name contemporary choreographers who have invested a lot of time in codifying these types of techniques. William Forsythe and Ohad Naharin have done research that is invested in standardizing dancers' approach to movement in regards to imagery and or sensation. Their techniques are different from each other, but the investment in the mind-body connection is similar. Forsythe's improvisational techniques are more analytical while Naharin's Gaga technique is more sensation-based. I am far from an expert in either of these techniques, but I have enough knowledge to point out how these codified approaches fall in line with this current trend of the modern/contemporary genre.

This past summer I took a Forsythe improvisational techniques workshop at the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance taught by Thomas McManus. In this class I was exposed to exercises that used the mind in an analytical way while dancing. One basic exercise we tried was

imagining that we were inside an icosahedron surrounded by its 27 points. We then would pick points to circle with varying parts of our body. For example, imagine trying to clearly circle a point on the side of your right hip with your elbow, knee, and then ear. A more standard exercise we practiced was drawing letters in space with specific body parts. When I have been asked to do this exercise before it has often been described as tracing the letter on only one plane, like you would on a piece of paper. In McManus' class he encouraged us to do that, but also think of drawing letters with a 360° awareness of space. The difference between these two ideas would be like drawing an "M" on the ground with your foot, compared to drawing a large "M" that started in one corner of the studio and ended on the opposite corner.

I was also asked to do tasks that were more complicated. One especially challenging exercise had the following structure. McManus taught the class a phrase. After memorizing it we were asked to imagine that we had a clone of ourselves dancing that phrase in front and around us. Then you were supposed to match and find negative space around the imagined figure, who was doing the phrase in real time. This exercise, as you probably can imagine, is extremely difficult. There is so much that you have to keep track of in your mind that it is easy to get lost. It was amazing to watch McManus demonstrate because his clarity in this exercise was astounding. It was inspirational for me to see how cognitive skills can shape movement with an overwhelming amount of specificity and accuracy.

Naharin's Gaga technique also shapes movement with specificity by using the mind in a particular way. When taking a Gaga class you commit yourself to an hour of non-stop movement with a teacher who guides you through specific ideas to embody. Most of the time the exercises are done interpersonally while you improvise, but sometimes you are asked to follow certain exercises led by the teacher. No one is allowed to sit and watch a Gaga class, and I suspect that this is because you cannot come to an understanding of these ideas without actually

putting yourself in the practice. Unlike Forsythe's improvisational techniques, Gaga is more interested in dancers shaping movement by thinking about images or sensations in the body. I will attempt to describe some of the exercises in a Gaga class, but please bear in mind that this work is meant to be embodied.

All Gaga classes start with improvising and connecting to the way your body wants to move in that moment. Within that improvisation you are asked to connect to the idea of floating. Floating can mean multiple things; it has been described to me as a sensation of your whole body floating in a jell-o like substance, as well as an awareness of how your bones are floating inside your skin. Another common exercise is the idea of quaking. Often when people hear the word "quake" they move their body with a free flow that lacks an awareness of their limbs. This quality of movement is called shaking and is different than quaking. The difference between the two is that shaking is something that you do to your body while quaking is something that happens to you.

One of my favorite sensations in a Gaga class is achieved with a partner. One person connects to their floating sensation while the other violently drums on their partner's body with an open hand. You are essentially showered in hits. The result of the work is a very intense tingle in the body where it feels like every cell is buzzing. Often in exercises like this, or ones that require more endurance, the instructor will ask you to connect your pain to your pleasure. This adds another level to the way you are thinking about the movement. Instead of believing that an exercise is hurting you and backing away from it, you wind up using your mind to control how you think about pain or fatigue. The result of this strengthens and shapes the intention of the movement. The exercises in Gaga are a very different type than those in the Forsythe techniques, but like the Forsythe technique there is a clearly articulated way of using the mind to create or shape movement.

Using the mind to create and add texture by exploring imagery and sensation in this particular way has been part of a natural

evolution in the modern/contemporary genre. I believe that this evolution has occurred for a couple of main reasons. If we examine the evolution of modern dance we can see that shaping movement through this type of cognitive process was and is clearly the next step. Generally speaking, the genre transitioned from the codified techniques of Graham, Limon, Horton, and many others to an obliteration of technique with the post-modernist. Then the next step was to embrace and utilize all techniques, so as to use as much knowledge of the body as possible. In my opinion since the body can only take so many shapes, what was left to do but define and explore how you think, approach, and experience movement? This is not to say that other choreographers and dancers before now did not think about and consider how they approached movement; what is different, though, is what is being thought about and how this is prioritized. Choreographers today are more invested in a dancer's thoughts about how they move rather than an emotional intent or a correctly pointed foot.

It is not just Forsythe and Naharin who are working in this way. In a Ralph Lemon workshop I took recently, taught by two of his dancers, I found that they too were approaching movement with an investment in sensation. In the class we were asked to improvise with speed and rigor and a constantly changing focus so that we became disoriented and exhausted. We danced to the point where you would naturally stop because you are so tired of moving, and then we were pushed to keep dancing after hitting that wall. The movement quality changes immensely, and

the shift in quality is not something that can be mimicked or achieved without doing the exercise. One thing we were asked to do in that workshop is to not watch form but watch energy. And I feel like this notion clearly describes how the modern/contemporary is different from the genre's past lineage. Choreographers and teachers today are asking dancers to prioritize the focus on critically thinking about their approach and sensation, rather than their form or how they look from the outside.

I also want to point out that I think this evolution of the modern form is related to the recent cultural investment in the "thinking dancer." The "thinking dancer" is a movement towards dispelling the myth that dancers lack intelligence and critical reasoning skills. When a dancer performs tasks that are heavily weighted in the use of mind and body, the dancer's ability to think is very much on display. By investing in this type of cognitive skill dancers feel empowered by how they think about what they do. I think this is a new approach to movement and creativity that is helping the form evolve.

The modern and contemporary genre is constantly changing and growing, which makes it challenging to pinpoint where it is at any given moment. That said, it's important to acknowledge that shifts in the modern/contemporary form have been made. Teachers, choreographers, and dancers alike have embarked on a quest to find new qualities of movement. These new qualities are being discovered through a process of prioritizing the investigation of movement that is experienced by activating the mind's ability to connect to imagery and sensation.



## **At 5'8", is 124 pounds too big?**

*Times change, but do the weight-related demands of ballet companies change with them?*

*by Jennifer Hunter*

I began my research thinking there may be hope for the ballet world. That maybe in today's world companies would accept any size ballet dancer if they were talented. I knew there was pressure to be thin in companies during the 1970s, but I also thought that this pressure would have subsided as awareness increased. We are in the year 2011, and there are still directors of ballet companies that will only use extremely thin ballet dancers. I interviewed five dancers about the pressure they felt to be thin, uncovering some of the difficulties for dancers and risks they take when in a ballet company.

Diane Diefenderfer, now a UC Irvine lecturer, danced with Frankfurt Ballet from 1973-1977 and Eglevsky Ballet until the end of 1978. Both were Balanchine style companies, the directors all having danced with the New York City Ballet. Diefenderfer explained that when she was dancing in these companies the directors' focused on what was visually pleasing to watch. "If the visual isn't right, then they will say something or do something or cut back." A lot of Balanchine choreography has to do with the shapes and lines on stage. "Balanchine really wanted skinny girls. I wasn't in his company, but you heard stories...the grape diet, the carrot diet...we had a girl at L.A. Ballet on the carrot diet and I swear she turned orange—all she ate were carrots for a few weeks." Diane was lucky to be very thin her whole life, so she was never pressured by any of the company directors. She was aware that they chose girls that had a certain look. "It is not necessarily weight—you need long legs, high extension, and good feet. We had some girls in the company that were 5'3" or 5'4" but their proportions were of the Balanchine type."

Balanchine-style companies continue to be strict about what you look like. A dancer that chooses to remain anonymous told me about her Balanchine company experience between 2006 and 2010. After one rehearsal of a "leotard

ballet," she said, "I had a meeting with my directors and they told me that I was being removed from the ballet for not being in top physical condition. This experience was extremely difficult to deal with as a dancer, because it was the first time I had been told that my body was not acceptable." She recalls that when she first joined the company, there were a variety of different body types. "I remember feeling so happy because I was surrounded by beautiful, strong, and healthy dancers. It was so incredible, because I didn't feel that you had to have a perfect body to be a beautiful dancer in this company. There were some short girls and some tall girls and everyone appeared to be fit and healthy."

Clearly, even today, dancers are told that they can't perform because of their body shape. It affected this dancer in a negative way, but she is positive about her company experience anyway. "The experience I talked about did negatively affect my dancing for a period of time, and it did make me question my place in the ballet company world. But I realized that I was worrying too much about one kind of opinion and in ballet everything is subjective." She decided to enter graduate school and is excited to continue her dance career after graduation.

Michel Gervais, another lecturer at UCI, started his career in 1986 at Theater Ballet of Canada, in Ottawa, Ontario. Gervais was lucky to be very skinny and didn't have to worry about losing weight. But he saw how it worked with others: "The thing that I noticed the most, especially at auditions, is the people who didn't have the bodies just didn't get the jobs." He was a dancer in the mid-80s and 90s, and at this time the directors were specific about the way they wanted their dancers to look. Gervais talked about how he was always in small dance companies throughout his career, and even in these companies he noticed other dancers being pressured to keep their bodies slim. Both well-

known and less-known companies seem to hire only dancers that are underweight.

Alan Alberto is currently a professional dancer in Croatia. He was pressured to be thin at his first ballet school. Many people Alan danced with had to change their body in order to be in the company, he says: "The career is very demanding, and we do whatever it takes to make it work. We are always looking at our bodies and being judged, so the thinner the better." Alan explains that being cast for a show is based on your body type. "I've seen people not get parts or be taken out of pieces because the director thought they looked too fat to be on stage." Alan has never had a conversation about losing weight with his directors, but he still feels a lot of pressure. "Directors may not tell you that you are being taken out of a dance, they will just take you out of the dance or take you out of the company. This causes people to change their body because it is for their career as a dancer."

"We were under a lot of pressure to weigh a certain amount," says Lucy Nagle, who danced with Houston Allegro Dance Company and was one of my many ballet teachers growing up in Pasadena. She recalls that "sort of late on a Saturday, after an incredibly arduous rehearsal, the director pulled me [and two other dancers] into the office to tell us we were too heavy and that we needed to do something about it. [One of the other dancers] became bulimic and [the third] starved herself." Lucy explained that even after

this meeting she never had an eating disorder and just ate healthy food all the time. When thinking about the meeting she brings up that, "It all just made me more driven to pursue all sorts of dance outside of ballet. I am now, in a strange way grateful for that push." It didn't work that way for other. "Several of my friends who developed eating disorders have passed away, all with heart attacks around their late 40s and early 50s." Still, even after a difficult beginning to her dance career, Lucy is very optimistic about the future. "Nothing and no one can get me. I have enjoyed, and continue to enjoy my dance road."

It seems as though ballet has stayed the same in our changing world. I interviewed five people who had danced with ballet companies, from a few different eras, and I am a little closer to understanding the way a company works. In all of the interviews I noticed a trend; there are some companies that may not care as much about weight, but the majority of them only hire dancers who are very slim. The five people I interviewed all stress the importance of being thin in order to succeed in the ballet world. When searching for a company to dance with you will face some difficult directors who want to change the way your body looks. Many directors might have unreal expectations for what a dancer's body should look like. So, there might be other things more important than the opinion of a director—for example, your health, which is needed to continue dancing for a long time!

# Keeping Dance in Your Life

*What happens if you leave college and don't work as a dancer?*

*by Lauren Stoll*

As we near the end of our undergraduate careers, many of us are overwhelmed with anxiety. Although we're excited to celebrate this scholastic achievement, we are also consumed by the perils of the unknown – the discomfort of insecurity. I think this emotional conflict affects dance majors more than any other undergraduate students. Even in a booming economy, it's hard to find a dance job—try finding one during an economic crisis. Although the dream is to join a professional company upon graduation, many of us have concluded that a professional career in dance (performing, choreographing, teaching, etc.) is not a viable option.

What happens when you realize you may not be able to dance as much as you used to? This realization scares me, for I don't know what I would do if I lost dance completely. The newfound challenge, then, is learning how to keep dance in your life when it does not serve as your primary career. I am here to offer you peace of mind and consolation, because a dance major has a variety of applications outside of the professional/performance realm. Not only are these options relevant but they are also reliable.

Coping with the notion that dance could be less present in my life has been a challenge for me for the last couple years. I enjoy the physically active aspect of dance, taking classes regularly and performing to improve. But I've also made a decision that takes me away from it. I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in medicine, which requires extreme dedication, self-motivation, and perseverance. The more involved I became in the medical field, the more I realized that this was my calling, but it meant sacrificing a meaningful passion in my life. Clinical experience combined with a slew of bulky pre-medical courses requires an immense amount of time and energy, and although the stress may seem unbearable at times, I have never wanted anything so badly.

So, how do I cope with the dwindling of my dance life? I make connections; I recognize the powerful fusion created by dance and medicine. It was after discovering the dance science field that medicine became even more attractive to me. It validated my decision to become a dance major, because it turns out that it's not mandatory to be a science major to apply to medical school. Still, I cannot tell you how many times I have had to explain my educational endeavors, for it perplexes almost everyone. Dance and medicine may seem entirely unrelated to some people, but the dance world is consumed by issues of health, wellness, treatment, and recovery. Practitioners facilitate all of these areas when medical intervention is necessary, so what better physician than one who understands the dancer's body from a personal perspective? Suddenly, dance is not so distant after all.

I am currently developing an independent research project that demonstrates one way to use my dance background. It is advised that pre-medical students acquire research experience prior to applying to medical school. Fortunately, I have had the tremendous opportunity to work with the department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the Neuropsychiatry facility at the UCI Medical Center. Their ongoing study consists of a pharmaceutical approach to the treatment of Alzheimer's disease, tracking the progress of patients through cognitive assessments. How does this even remotely relate to the dance field? Well, behold. Herein lies my approach to prolonging the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

After some brainstorming and literature reviewing, I came across the subject of physical exercise and its role in decreasing the effects of dementia in the elderly. BINGO. I couldn't ask for a more perfect idea for a research project. To further develop my idea, I drafted a questionnaire designed for two groups – subjects diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and

subjects diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (AD). The questionnaire inquires about daily physical activity and whether or not exercise has been a part of their life. I created a list of common physical exercises to choose from, including dance. My working hypothesis is that individuals with MCI are more likely to remain physically active than those with AD, since MCI is a less severe dementia condition. If I had more funding, I would love to conduct a follow-up study for which I would design a moderate exercise program structured around a basic dance curriculum. My subjects would participate for a period of one to two years, with cognitive assessments at 6-month intervals. I would be interested to see if states of dementia would improve, maybe even indicate the beginning of a reversal, after being exposed to a total body and mind exercise program. With these ideas, I have managed to take something that is seemingly different from dance and create a perfectly relevant application.

In my investigation of using movement as healing for mental health, I came across the American Dance Therapy Association. Their mission is to promote physical and mental health and wellness through dance and movement. This association provides educational and certification opportunities for those interested in becoming

dance therapists, as well as information on workshops, intensives, conferences, and other programs. Their website is filled with resources and opportunities. I believe in the healing power and therapeutic value of movement; dance therapy is another way to exercise one's knowledge of dance and the physical body to help others and to give back to the community. Dance is put in a different perspective, apart from the lights, costumes, and makeup. Active participation in American Dance Therapy Association would keep dance in your life in a lucrative and rewarding way.

The overarching theme of my story is simply this: you can keep dance in your life no matter what field you decide to enter. Almost every dance major in the UCI Dance Department pursues additional majors, minors, and/or concentrations, demonstrating the array of talent and intelligence in this community. Dance is connected to all of them. Not only will your career be more fulfilling, but it will also be more reliable. Do not feel discouraged when dance opportunities seem slim, and do not deny opportunities to fuse dance with other areas of study, interest, or passion. It is possible for dance to remain in your life; in fact, the possibilities are endless.

#### Resources:

<http://www.adta.org/>

<http://www.healthcare.uci.edu/>

## When is it teaching, and when is it abuse?

*Old-fashioned methods of “teaching” may still be traumatizing some dancers in the studio*

*by Jaclyn Kriewall*

Years ago, I was trained in the Vaganova method of ballet, which is commonly perceived as physically demanding. My instructor – who will remain anonymous – embodied the idea of a strict Russian master, expecting white leotards and ribbons on our soft ballet shoes everyday. It was a constant struggle getting through those days, especially at the young age of ten. She consistently reminded me, “You have the body type for dance, but you are bow-legged, therefore, you will never become a dancer.” I cried all the time, during and after technique class. I was very self-conscious about my body, and even became angry that my physicality was not good enough. Ironically, I continued learning from her, and spent the next five years being told I would never become a dancer.

Dancers of all styles have been the victim of abuse by their instructors at one point or another. Whether it is of a verbal or physical nature, it harms and distresses a student. In the dance community, a dancer is expected to advance through each level through extensive technical work. Constructive criticism is a way of assisting the educational process. However, this form of teaching can easily become abuse. Numerous dancers of all genres and levels of training have been exposed to or been personally victimized by their dance masters. Most dancers are aware of these so-called “training methods” but choose not to confront the problems when they arise.

I asked myself, “When does a dancer know he or she is being abused by an instructor? Specifically, what methods are used, and how is the student affected?” Naturally, when someone is inflicted with unwarranted pain, mentally and/or physically, it is considered abuse. It is not acceptable to be violated and belittled by the words or actions of an instructor. One dancer claimed that her past teacher gave her an “Indian burn” when correcting her arm placement during a ballet technique class. She described her

instructor as being very “hands on,” so manually placing limbs in proper positions was a predominant method. However, the instructor was so harsh it left the dancer in unnecessary pain, rather than a muscle-strengthening pain or stretching flexibility pain.

Sometimes, the use of external teaching aids can be harmful. I’ve heard about objects such as rulers, canes, scarves, water bottles and even cigarette lighters being used to “motivate” a dancer. One dancer revealed that her instructor dropped his cigarette ashes down her leotard in order to fix her posture. Another claimed that her teacher put a lighter under her leg, hoping the fire would encourage her to lift it higher. These examples of torturous methods are just a few in the grand scheme of authoritarian abuse.

Further abuse of dancers occurs when there are constant peer comparisons. Most dancers have been compared to someone else, whether it is by a teacher or they do it themselves. Though competition sometimes motivates dancers, it also has the potential to be detrimental. When a teacher comments on one’s body size or movement limitations, it is always a touchy subject. For instance, I endured numerous years of constant reminders that I was not as flexible as “So-in-So” in my class. On a daily basis, I was compared and contrasted to the most flexible, Gumby-like girl. I became the “Stiff-Looking Girl,” and was only considered for roles that involved quickness and steadfast movements. My instructor tried to convince me that being stiff was my signature style. In the end, I could never shake the feeling that I wasn’t good enough.

The same instructor also made it a point to comment a girl who had a well-endowed womanly figure. Granted, she was no larger than a size two, but was gifted with an hour-glass physique. She was easily one of the best ballet dancers I have ever seen, but she was belittled and humiliated in front of her peers for having a larger cup size than the typical ballerina. Though

a teacher may say humiliation is meant to change a dancer's errors, it's an abusive approach. A fellow dancer once told me she was performing and fell on stage. Her teacher had videotaped the moment and used it as a teaching aid for the rest of her students. Watching the clip repeatedly, she informed her students *why* the girl fell and *how* it could be corrected. The dancer was so humiliated after the sixth or seventh viewing of her "mistake," she never returned to the studio.

Not every teacher is abusive, but stories like that are sadly not rare. In most cases, dance teachers and choreographers were exposed to the same behaviors when they were students and have since emulated the same teaching methods. Many find their methods beneficial and efficient, coercing their dancers to fit a predisposed mold. The idea of breaking their students down and revealing their vulnerability is a predominant form of educating. It becomes a way of separating the weak from the strong. Though some trainers are fully aware of their domineering authority, others are not. These dance masters are blinded by their ideas of how to achieve excellence.

If a dancer is being mistreated and chooses to continue training under the authoritarian, I ask "Why?" What is the reasoning behind this relationship? In an article called "The Messages Behind the Methods: The Authoritarian Pedagogical Legacy in Western concert Dance Technique Training and Rehearsals," dance educator Robin Lakes discusses all these issues. Lakes states that a dancer might have the utmost respect for their dance trainer, regardless of the abuse. As a result, he or she is hesitant about any confrontation. Disagreement may challenge the instructor's knowledge and experiences in the field. Another consideration is the idea that the dancer *wants* negative criticism. Rather than abuse, students may view it as complimentary, believing that any type of attention is good.

Even when they go through traumatizing events, many dancers continue to train under the

same master. Why is this trend consistent? Could it be that these dancers feel they are actually *benefitting* from the superfluous strictness? Depending on the individual circumstance, are they succeeding in altering their habits? One dancer I talked to says "Yes." She explained that while dancing at a Boston conservatory, her instructor slapped her hand because the finger placement was wrong. Naturally, she never made that mistake again, fearing she would be attacked. This dancer states that by using a scare tactic, teachers are able to get what they want in a shorter amount of time. She believes that if she did not fear her trainer, she would still be positioning her hand incorrectly, among other things.

Members of the dance community have always pursued this art with a preconceived idea of what hard work and determination might look like. Some even believe that abuse is part of the deal. Having been a victim of this specific type of abuse and sharing similar experiences with fellow dancers, I have learned that it is practiced everywhere. In the end, I believe these methods are very effective. If I had not been exposed to this particular environment, I would not be where I am today – a Dance major at a University of California, pursuing a professional career. It is unfortunate that I obtained my training in an abusive manner, but I do not know where I would be without that experience. My fellow dancers and interviewees share similar thoughts. Though it is not necessary to mistreat one's students, it has been considered useful for a dancer's technique. Unfortunately, the lasting emotional, and possibly physical, effects could be damaging. In her article, Robin Lakes states that there needs to be a change. In order to eliminate the abuse in the studios, dancers striving to instruct should be cognizant of how *they* are teaching; refraining from methods that were used on them as students. By altering their mistakes, we can become more knowledgeable and humane teachers.

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## **Stereotypes: the Good, the Bad, and the Misleading**

*Do you ever judge dancers by their appearances? Snap judgments can lead to limited careers when choreographers miss out on a good thing.*

*by Corinna Ductor*

Picture this... you're walking across campus and you notice a girl wearing pink tights, bun intact, walking turned out with her head lifted high above the horizon. Automatically certain stereotypes come to mind, right? She's snobby, she's most likely bad at hip hop, and she might have an eating disorder. These are only a few stereotypes that go along with ballet dancers, but is it really that easy to tell what people are like? People stereotype others on a daily basis, and many times unknowingly. Stereotypes are often seen as negative, but it occurred to me that they can also have benefits. I really wanted to discover what stereotypes were present here at UCI, so I interviewed some graduate and undergraduate dancers and found very different and insightful opinions.

It's clear that stereotypes are not true for every dancer associated with a particular dance style, but also that sometimes, they are there for a reason. Some stereotypes stick because of media portrayals and also because we as dancers continue to enforce them. For example, Natalie Johnson, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year dance major, identifies herself as a contemporary-modern/jazz dancer. However, she made the point that almost everyone instantly stereotypes her as a "bun head" (ballerina) because of her long legs and thin body type. It was unanimous among all interviewees that ballerinas have the stereotype of having a thin, long body and a bun on their head, no matter what the dance class they are in. Another stereotype that Darina Littleton, a 4th year dance major, pointed out with ballerinas is that they are uppity and snobbish. Now, this stereotype is quite ridiculous because I know plenty of ballet dancers who are not snobbish whatsoever. But this stereotype grew partly because of how the American public views ballerinas, which has a lot to do with the way ballerinas are depicted in the media, especially in films and television shows.

Conversely, hip hop is painted by the media as a commercial dance form. Many people think of hip hop, as Littleton put it, as "booty-shaking" because that is what they see in music videos. The problem with this, as she points out, is that many people mistakenly think hip hop does not require any technique, like other dance forms do. Another label hip hop dancers have is that they are mostly African American and Hispanic and not Caucasian because hip hop is so closely related to rap music. I'm sure many of us have turned on a music video and have seen that one white girl in the background with ten African American and Hispanic dancers. Although stereotypes are there for a reason, we cannot generalize because that is when stereotypes create problems in the dance community.

The dance community here at UCI is continuously growing and expanding with talented young artists of all different genres of dance. However, certain stereotypes create segregation among dancers, which only facilitates an unhealthy learning environment. For instance, UCI currently has two different dance ensembles, Donald McKayle's Etude Ensemble and Sheron Wray's Insight jazz Ensemble. One of my interviewees, who chose to remain anonymous, felt that the Etude Ensemble was an elite group in the dance program here at UCI. Because of this exclusive label, she feels the Etude ensemble creates a separation between the dancers in the UCI dance community, consequently creating an "outsider" and "insider" group. On the other hand, she feels the jazz ensemble is very inclusive and has a stronger sense of openness. Brian Gonzalez, a 4th year dance major, agreed with the separation stereotypes can cause and noted that "when people are associated with specific dance styles they tend to have classes together and be in the same dance groups and unknowingly form their own cliques." This is a



huge consequence of dancers classifying each other in the dance community, because when dancers form cliques based on their dance styles and abilities, they only continue to enhance these stereotypes.

In addition to causing segregation in a dance community, stereotypes can also prevent dancers from expanding their dance careers. Gonzalez, who identifies himself as a social dancer as well as a jazz dancer, feels that he is only viewed as a salsa dancer during auditions at UCI, and since the curriculum here is dominated by ballet, modern, and jazz, he thinks his opportunities have been limited. Many dancers are well-rounded and have the ability to perform multiple styles of dance, but it can be hard when choreographers and teachers can't envision a dancer apart from a perceived "usual" style. Littleton also notes that if a dancer does not "look" the part, they most likely will not get cast, no matter what their ability. Stereotypes have a lot to do with looks, so if a dancer doesn't look like a Laker girl, for example, she will probably have a tough time getting the job as a Laker girl. Categorizing a performer during or before an audition only continues to enforce stereotypes, which can ultimately affect the growth of a dancer in his or her dancing career. Kim Loveridge, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate student, explains that even before an audition, she usually has an idea of who she wants to cast. Because she takes classes with many undergraduate dancers on a daily basis,

she is able to see how they perform in class. This can be seen as giving some dancers an unfair advantage in an audition process.

Stereotypes have many negative consequences in the dance community, but that does not mean that stereotypes cannot work in a dancers benefit. For instance, Littleton says, if a dancer does look the part, and has the skill to back it up, then that stereotype can work to their advantage. Justin Keats, a 4th year dance major, agrees: "If a stereotype gets you a job, then it's a good thing." Being typecast during an audition is not always negative because sometimes, it gets a dancer noticed in the right way.

So now think to yourself. Have you ever categorized a dancer the first time you met them or saw them dance? When I first entered UCI as a freshman, I can say that I did. But now, having danced with many of these talented dancers in one of the most prestigious dance schools in the country for three years, I can say my perceptions have changed. This has caused me to realize that stereotypes are generalizations that are not true for everyone. Although there are some benefits that come out of stereotyping, there are many negative consequences that go along with it. We need a dance school that is a community and not divided by certain cliques and stereotypes. First impressions are not always the right impressions, so I offer you this—before you "judge a book by its cover," get to know your dance peers, because you may be ultimately surprised.

*My thanks to interviewees Justin Keats, Allyson Blackstone, Natalie Johnson, Brian Gonzalez, Darina Littleton, Kim Loveridge, and a dancer who chose to remain anonymous.*



*Lindsay Berliner  
in Malaga, Spain, with UCI's improvisation ensemble, summer, 2010*