DANCE MAJOR JOURNAL

Dance Writing for Dance Majors Spring 2012

IN THIS ISSUE:

Dance Major Journal

Thanks for support from the Dance Department at the University of California, Irvine.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This 3rd annual edition of *Dance Major Journal* continues to provide writing on topics of interest to dancers who study at universities and those who seek to understand them. In this issue, we inaugurate a section devoted to contributions from alumni and professionals, as well as providing two dance MFA student points of view on the topic of the injured dancer. The issue begins with an award-winning essay about the power of dance to redeem a life going astray and to help choreograph a purposeful future.

Getting dancers and choreographers to write is not always the easiest task, but when they do, the power of dance emerges in myriad ways, at the university level and beyond.

Soon to join the University of California Scholarship platform (by the Fall of 2012), *DMJ* welcomes submissions from dance majors or professionals who have something to say to dancers at a university, or those who might be thinking of it for the future. This hard copy issue will also appear electronically on the Dance Department page of UC Irvine (www.dance.uci.edu).

Submissions on topics of interest to dance majors are welcome at any time. Please submit electronically to Professor Jennifer Fisher, *DMJ* Editor, at dmjinfo@uci.edu.

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From Prison Bars to Ballet Barres

Not all roads to the dance studio are alike. How did a macho "gangster" type end up in tights? Through evolution, it turns out. Evidently, you can be destroyed by the wrong moves and redeemed by the right ones, as one dance major's journey shows.

by Edgar Baldemar Rodriguez

Rodriguez at the Alhambra

My parents came to California from Mexico shortly before I was born. My father began working at about the age of six to help support the family, which would eventually grow to include 12 siblings. He sold bubble gum, shined shoes, cleaned windshields, and sang on the street playing his little guitar. When all else failed, he begged for nickels. When he did attend school, he shared shoes with his brother, so at any given point only one of them was wearing shoes. He never made it past the sixth grade. My mother was raised an only child by Mami, my grandmother. I call her Mami (pronounced similarly to Mommy with a Spanish accent) because that's what my mother called her. Mami received word that her estranged husband planned to kidnap my mother and take her to the hills where he lived. Mami was terrified; this was a very real threat. Mami had been abducted by him, and then married to him at gunpoint when she was only 14. The guns he and his brother brandished were pointed at the priest. Mami and my mom would live many years after that, under the constant threat that he was just around the next corner.

Why does this matter? How does something that happened to my parents before I was born affect me? Well, I think that when I was trying to figure out who I was, trying to find my identity and purpose in this world, the first thing I had to consider was where, and with whom, the whims of destiny had set me. Five of us, my parents, my two sisters, and I, lived in a small trailer on my uncle's property on a small patch of dirt in the back yard for many years before moving into our own home in a violent L.A. neighborhood. The first of many bad memories I have of living there is, strangely enough, about an event I wasn't even there for but was recounted to me many times. It began as a description of a warm night with young children playing tag or kick the can. Laughter was in the air, and the smear of chili fries decorated a couple of the children's faces. Then, there was the screeching of tires and some loud popping sounds. "Maybe someone brought fireworks from Tijuana," a few of the children thought. The scene ends with my best friend clutching at his chest, staggering across the

street, riddled with bullets, collapsing on a pile of rocks in his front yard lifelessly. My other friends heard him scream. He was screaming for his mother. He was the first of many I lost this way.

For reasons like this, my parents kept us indoors as often as possible. Sometimes my sisters and I would stay inside from the moment we arrived home, until we went back to school the following day. For a young boy full of energy and curiosity, it was a frustrating experience. Indoors, there were only a few entertainment options—a radial dial television with a wire hanger for an antenna, some toys of which I can't remember, and a record player with my parents' music. At times we lived on rice, beans, and powdered milk for weeks on end; maybe months. I should have been grateful for having a loving family, food, and a home, but that's just not how my mind processed these things. The patches on my clothes and the shoes from the second-hand stores were an outward reflection of how I valued myself inside.

I remember the first time I actually gave any consideration to my future. I was standing at our front gate waiting for my father to come home from work when I saw the local gang members across the street dressed in really nice clothes, kicking back next to cool low rider cars, and hanging out with the most beautiful girls I had ever seen. They stood tall, slightly leaned back, looking beneath or beyond their gangsta "Locs" sunglasses; they joked and laughed, and seemed to be challenging the world to bring what it may. My father drove up at that moment, absolutely filthy with soot and aluminum shavings from factory work, seemingly defeated and definitely exhausted. I looked back and forth between the two scenes, and something in my mind stirred. There were thoughts forming, perhaps questioning, "What will I be like?"

We moved around a lot. My parents always tried to find safer neighborhoods, and better schools, but ultimately, we couldn't really afford it. We would just end up in different barrios, with different problems. By the time I graduated high school, we had come full circle to our first home. Guns, fights, drugs, theft, they were all having an increased presence in my life. My friends were now those same people I saw across the street. I incorporated into my body their tough stance, the menacing glare, and threatening gestures. One night I was seriously beaten; I don't really remember all the details. I'm sure I deserved it. After the emergency room, I woke up in Mexico where Mami helped nurse me back to health. Shortly thereafter I enlisted in the Navy. The experience was short lived; I had a difficult time following orders.

I returned to my neighborhood where over the course of many months my bad decisions led to worse ones. Early one morning, in the darkest hours just after midnight, I found myself on the highway in an upturned car. The blood in my eyes obscured my vision, and my brain seemed to beat itself against my skull. I managed to unbuckle and landed head- first. Heaving for breath against my broken ribs, I labored out of the car and away from the revving engine. The evening's events came to me slowly, in fragmented form, and with each one I became more and more frightened. I must have fallen asleep on the way home. Had I drunk too much? Where was I? I know I was confused and scared, but in retrospect I can't see it any other way than believing I fled the scene, because I was a coward.

I would later find out there was another vehicle, another life, impacted that day. My car slammed into his as he waited in the emergency lane for help because of mechanical issues. His car was thrown off the road and out of view, and mine, into the air and on its roof. I had several charges filed against me, and I couldn't bear the

thought of jail, not because I feared it, but because I was having a "great time." Besides, I didn't do it on purpose right? What a lame excuse. I took my case to trial. I lost. I was sentenced to prison for 3 months to undergo evaluation. I wasn't sentenced to probation, or city jail, not even county jail. The judge said state prison.

While serving my time, brief as it was, I behaved like I thought the court wanted me to. I was the model inmate seemingly good in my behavior, remorseful in my interviews, but indignant in my thoughts. I convinced myself that this situation was unfair, that my entire life was now ruined and it wasn't entirely my fault. Didn't the system understand that no one would ever trust me, hire me, or love me? All I had was time to reflect, and the only thing I could think, no matter how irresponsible I was, was that I wasn't really a bad person. But now, now I was labeled. Now I was a criminal, and that's all I'd ever be, and that's all I'd ever know. At some point, I decided not to fight it.

For the next 10 years I was in and out of jail, sometimes for a couple of days, sometimes for months. I don't know how many times I was arrested, but I know that it transformed me. During my incarcerations, my perceptions of social norms changed. I absorbed inmate mores, suppressed decent morality, and used life on the inside as a template from which to base all my decisions including my behavior. A good example of this is that I had a difficult time adjusting to public space after a pretty serious riot that erupted, without warning, at the county jail. After that, I was always looking over my shoulder, judging people by their appearance, always composed in a threatening stance, ready to fight, even if I was just at the store getting milk.

My last prison sentence was for three years. During this time, I reconnected with an aspect of myself I'd long forsaken: I liked stories. At first, I began to read simply as a distraction, a means of escape from the monotony of idle time. Then, I read for fun and information. It wasn't easy going from argot to eloquence, though. It took weeks of going back and forth between my books and the dictionary I borrowed from the guards. The first book I read I'd found tattered underneath the short leg of a day room table; it was entitled, appropriately I believe, Dante's *Inferno*. Being captivated by Virgil's plight is, in retrospect, easy to understand. After all, I was going through my own hell. His character was feeling some of the things I was feeling, emotions I didn't even know had names.

The awareness of words, of meaning, of existences, suffering, and repentance led me to hours, if not days of reflection. I'd pause in between sentences, shut the tome around my finger, resting one hand over the other. I'd close my eyes, or stare out the window, imagining, digesting, and wondering. The words gave me a better understanding of the world, of my place, and my convictions. I began to write poetry on scraps of paper with pencils I sharpened on the floor. I remember thinking of the childhood me, the one who dreamed of helping others, who was silly and always laughed, who waited for his hard-working father to come home, and who promised his mother a beautiful home one day. My inner child was in there, somewhere. Perhaps, there was still hope for me. After all Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* found redemption, maybe I could too. Maybe words, the communication of sentiments, and an education could take me to a better place.

I was released in a little less than two years for good behavior. I enrolled in my local community college immediately after my release. I didn't know what I was looking for, only that I would find it there. I devoured all my assignments with gusto. I was a good student, but completely anti-

social. I believed no one would ever understand me, and if I kept my mouth shut, no one would ever know I didn't belong there. At about this time, my younger sister was also going to school, but she had a daughter, was a single mother, and needed income. I didn't want her to give up on school, so I told her that we needed to support each other, and that whatever class she wanted to take, I would take it, too. She said she wanted to take a dance class. After a scornful look, I simply said to her, "no way." I wasn't going to be prancing about a stage, wearing tights, and putting makeup on. No self-respecting homeboy would do such a thing.

Ultimately, and quite fortunately, I decided she was more important to me than my self-image. The class I enrolled in with her was a Latin dance class. I was expected to interact with my peers, sway my hips and smile, move my arms in funny ways and turn on the balls of my feet. The defensive posture I was so accustomed to, that made me feel safe in my minacious demeanor, was not going to get me a good grade in class, and I cared about my GPA. So, I reluctantly began moving the way they wanted me to. Something interesting happened, or didn't happen. I didn't feel any weaker, any less masculine. I didn't feel threatened. I was having fun. I was moving my body in unfamiliar ways, or forgotten ways, and it's as if that movement was breaking the bounds of the façade I had worn for a long time, not only in my body, but in my reasoning as well.

One evening as I waited in the dance studio for a ride home, a group of ballet dancers, or modern dancers, I couldn't tell back then, came in to rehearse a piece. There I sat, underneath the ballet barres up against a mirror by the exit, seemingly indifferent, but curiously observing everything that was going on. I can't recall the music, or the dancers from that evening, but I remember the empty feeling swelling from my chest into my throat when the dancers began to move. I swear I understood them without a single utterance from their lips. Through their bodies and on their faces I saw both lightness and a weighed-down spirit. Those movements had meaning, perhaps abstract and arbitrary, but they carried significance. I was watching a story. It was a sad story; perhaps my story. It said something more powerful than I could ever explain. Movement provided a whole new vocabulary that reached beyond words.

I fell in love with dance at that moment; I was 31. I knew I would never be a professional dancer, but I knew I would always need dance in my life. I would be happy in a dilapidated house, drinking water and eating bread, getting wherever I needed to go on foot, if I could only wake up for the rest of my life dancing for a living. I enrolled in any dance course that would fit my schedule and performed at every school concert. Within dance I also found the realization of cultural diversity, and what a delicious treat it is to explore the beauty of differences. I studied movement from the Middle-East to Africa, Europe to Asia. Each dance brought with it a history, a people, and a way of life. Dance became a way for me to relate to other people in the similarities and differences of our customs, the humor in some old traditions, and the mutual respect of each other's beliefs. "How do they dance?" I asked. "When do they do it? Wow, they have good food, too? How do they say hello?" The love of people, of all people, surged within me.

Something good was happening to me; I was curious about what it was. I wondered if I could harness it, and share it with others. I decided to get a second AA degree in dance (my first was in liberal arts). I was very proud—no one in my family, or extended family, that I was aware of, even had one degree. I submitted my applications

to transfer after that and was accepted to practically all the schools I applied to. Every time I received an acceptance letter, I cried. I cried remembering all my parent's hard work in factories, their constant worrying, the tears on their faces, all of which I caused. I cried because I'd wasted so many years of my life. I cried because I'd been so mean to everyone. I needed to deserve this opportunity so I set myself upon the task of creating something good from my past, which continues to torment me. I just didn't know how I would do it. With the support of good family and friends, I decided to go to UC Irvine because their dance program is highly regarded and very much sought after. The way I figured, if I was going to find my niche in the dance world, this is where the next chapter of my life would unfold.

At the community college, our grades for technique courses were based more on participation and effort, than skill and progress. Technique was, and continues to be, quite a challenge for me. Flexibility, kinesthetic memory, the ability to memorize choreography, isometric strength, the knowledge of dance terms to be a successful dancer—all were foreign concepts for me. I was lost. If I were asked not to sickle my foot, I would straighten it, and my back would arch. "Don't curl your hands; let the energy out and away from your fingertips into space," I was corrected. Okay fine, I'll do that. "Now watch your turn out and engage your core!" "I don't have turnout, and what's a core, is that like the root of my soul?" If I corrected something, two or three other things would fail in its place. Needless to say, technique was agonizingly slow in coming. To make matters worse for my self-perception, at UCI I was training with amazing dancers almost half my age. It was difficult to figure out for myself where my place was; I couldn't relate to anyone. I didn't look like anyone. I was closer in age to graduate students and instructors than I was to the undergraduates; I couldn't relate to any of them. I felt inadequate and so alone.

Relocating to Orange County had been a cultural shock in itself. The cultural make-up of the student body, not to mention their age and social upbringing, really highlighted our differences for me, and for some reason, the differences here weren't bringing me closer to anyone. Once again I found myself quietly simmering in a corner with my face in one book or another, afraid of being shunned for the lack in my abilities, afraid to talk about myself. I was anti-social again. I hated feeling like this. Ever since I had discovered dance, I had become childlike, animated, and social. It's like I reverted to the age I was before adult fiascos began. I started to move further and further back in the studio during class, hoping I would not be noticed, hiding my reflection in the mirror.

During the course of the Spring Quarter in 2011, I endured a very emotionally difficult time. My past mistakes had not disappeared, love was doing what it does worst, and I wasn't advancing in my technique courses, which held me back from graduating another year. The reasons for pushing myself into exhaustion, humiliation, and disappointment, didn't seem so valid anymore.

My resolutions began to falter, and I was giving serious consideration to giving up and getting into the workforce during a global recession. I was really close to giving up when I learned about a research opportunity studying abroad with the chair of our department. The research would involve a festival in Frigiliana, Spain, aimed at exploring the collaborative efforts of music, dance and digital arts as improve-isation. I love improvisation. I don't need technique or recalling choreography. I can simply dance. I can lose myself halfway across the world, lose myself in my

movement, and get a little respite from my memories. I submitted a proposal for funding that would involve site-specific dance improvisational work, poetry, and dance therapy. "These will help me," I thought, they've done it for me before, and maybe if I define how, I can share it.

The experience transformed me. I felt like I'd traveled the entire world, and that I danced everywhere in it. Sometimes the tears I shed during my dancing took with them a negative energy, which then allowed me the feeling that I could now move on. I lived and shared experiences with my new friends, and built relationships with my faculty who were now my mentors. Over a glass of wine on a warm summer night, I shared my past. I felt exposed and vulnerable, but they seemed only curious, and happy for me that I had come so far. While still in Europe, after the festival was over, I marked lines on a map, picked up my belongings and began to walk and explore before coming home. I didn't always know where I was, or how I got there, but I always knew where I was going.

I came back for my new school year, enlightened by the enormity of the world, and my new friends in my little corner of it. Today, I remind myself that mastering dance technique is not where my ambitions lie. Dance techniques for me are basic guidelines on which to build my own future, to have a fundamental knowledge and vocabulary with which to communicate. They are part of the history of which I am now part. My plans for dance are to use it in media for the telling of stories. I love the idea of a camera being able to bring into focus subtle movements or entire cities, the swaying of a hungry child, or the collapsing of a body whose life was cut short. I can transport an audience through film to the jungles in the Congo, the war-torn cities in the Middle East, or the streets of Los Angeles. Through research and movement, I can put together a narrative of a real life experience and produce a dance film that talks about the problems of a people and uses movement and cultural knowledge to deconstruct the issues.

You know, I still grumble when I put on my dance belt for ballet. My inner child struggles with the rebel in me. Sometimes one wins, sometimes the other wins, but I continue to move towards a greater goal, falling and failing, and getting myself back up again. I have come a long way and I have the bruises and scars on my body and spirit to prove it. But, I sincerely believe that my stories through dance will inform society about injustices, heroism, selflessness, forgiveness, or how we just take ourselves too seriously. I will create art through screen dance, video choreography, which will address social issues. This will be a better vehicle to transport my ideas to a greater audience than presenting them on a stage, because I am not limiting my viewers to the people in my corner of the world. Perhaps this is my redemption, perhaps now I can move on.

I accept that I have made mistakes and blamed the outside world instead of myself; that I am less than perfect. I also know that this paper lingers a lot on what went wrong in my life, which I focused on because I think that each artist comes into the arena with their own personal tragedies and insecurities, preconceptions, and lack of knowledge. Our task as artists is to sometimes focus on the pain, make it real and tangible for others to understand, and to sometimes rejoice and celebrate the good things in life. Just today, I did my happy dance. I believe we all have some form of this happy dance where we abandon our "grown up" ways, and become five years old again. I did this in honor of being accepted into the MFA program for dance at UC Irvine. Imagine that—a little homeboy from the barrio, working on his Master's Degree,

at one of the finest institutions in the country.

I'm grateful for my family, friends, all my mentors, for my state of mind, and for the chance to fulfill my ambitions. I know now that any day, even when I'm wearing tights or makeup, complaining about my male thong with my hairy leg painfully on top of a ballet barre—any day now is a far, far better day than the ones I spent dreaming, with my finger in a book, looking out above an electric fence, wondering what my legacy would be.

Edgar Rodriguez grew up in the Los Angeles area taking many odd jobs before going back to school. He received his AA in dance at Cerritos College before transferring to UC Irvine's Claire Trevor School of Arts. After graduation, he will enter UCI's Dance MFA program, where he plans to focus on dance, technology, and narrative. This essay won the 2012 award for Excellent Academic Writing in Humanities and Arts, at the University of California, Irvine.

Rodriguez in Frigiliana, Spain
Photo: Matt Torchia

Getting Rid of the Ballet Blues

Discouraged by ballet class? Feeling like an ugly duckling amid a lake of swans? Fear not, non-ballet specialist—Natalie Portman had a ballet double, after all, so that's how she pulled it off. For you and me, there IS a reason to keep plugging away at the barre.

Johnson and Andie Yorita have fun with their stereotypes. Photo courtesy Natalie Johnson

by Natalie Johnson

So, you are not exactly what they call a "ballet super-star." You, like many others, find the technique and ideals of the genre to be a challenge. Your feet feel more at home in a parallel position – even awkwardly turned-in feet trump the discomfort of turning your toes out. Grooving to some hip-hop beats, working on inversion skills, or strutting your stuff in jazz is more of your thing. Plus, pink tights make you cringe and the reflection of yourself in the mirror wearing a black leotard with those pretty-pink tights tucked into your slippers doesn't do much for your confidence. Eek! Have you ever looked this bad? You strive to put your hair into a bun or French twist to act the part, but would rather go with a sloppy up-do, comfy dance attire, and your favorite pair of socks.

Despite these hurdles, you show up to ballet class like the ugly duckling hoping to master the technique or just survive. (Fake it 'til you make it!) Yet, day after day of what seems like torture as you continually attempt to make some non-existent break-through, ballet succeeds only to get you down. Nothing seems to be going right. Your alignment could be better. Your feet and turns could be better. Nearly everything about you could and should be better. You know this because you have seen yourself in the mirror, and your ballet teacher has made enough corrections for you to get the idea. There are all these standards you will never, ever reach and your goal isn't even to be a ballerina!

If these feelings are familiar, you also know how easy it is to fall into a pattern of poor self-esteem. You begin to be critical of your body, magnify your faults, and doubt your capabilities. You don't see yourself making any progress, are unable to recognize your strengths, and fail to keep a good attitude. You realize that ballet is not your forte and being around a bunch of bun-heads is not making it any easier! At this point, you have created a negative image of yourself. With a depleted level of confidence and growing frustrations, you question your value as a dancer or why you are taking ballet at all if it's not your main priority. If you identify with any of this, call the doctor because you are suffering from a bad case of the ballet blues.

Ballet has a way of challenging us all for many different reasons. Whether it is physical, mental, or emotional, the demands made of the dancer who dreams a dream of ballet are immense. It is hard to ignore the many intimidation factors of the genre, which are a huge culprit in the constant attack on every dancer's ego. When I asked my peers in the dance department of the University of California, Irvine about their perspective on the ballet ideal, the responses were fairly universal. As put by Katy Felsinger, a senior who has always studied ballet but finds her comfort in jazz and modern, there is a standard of perfection that she has never quite reached. The inherent ideal of perfection in the ballet aesthetic causes many students to worry. Ballet calls for great extension, precision, alignment, coordination, and strength, Felsinger said. There is always the looming idea of the "ballet-body": what a dancer must look like to have a successful career. Then there is the hierarchy built into this dance form that grew out of the French courts, which is cause of great comparison between dancers. Add an injury or chronic pain to the mix and no wonder ballet is beating down on you.

Another dance major I talked with, Allyson Blackstone, said she skipped the first ballet class of the year. After getting dressed and ready to go, she was too nervous to show up. Being around all the higher-level ballet dancers made her think twice about taking class. She told me that every dancer knows their strengths and shortcomings. "I don't like exposing my weaknesses." It is embarrassing to put yourself in a classroom setting where you are not in your element and the aesthetic seems outside the realms of your capabilities. If you are not judging yourself, there is always the fear of how your teacher and peers perceive you as a dancer; that in the end, you might just not be good enough. Ballet is so precise, Blackstone said, that if you do not look a certain way, "then you are obviously not good."

It sounds pretty harsh, but this is the mentality and reality of many dancers and the unfortunate product of such a critical and hostile environment. Of course, just because ballet is difficult and not what you do best, that does not mean you are a bad dancer or should quit. Yet, if you are like many dance majors, ballet causes you to judge yourself more than other dance forms. "I tell myself ballet isn't all dance," Felsinger says. "Ballet isn't everything. Then I go into class, and whether it is the teacher or my own idea of it when I'm in ballet class, it feels like it's everything." It is obvious how a common mentality such as this brings dancers to question their self-worth.

Christopher Johnson, a junior dance major, told me how intimidating and discouraging it can be when you are not executing a move correctly and are unsure how to make your body perform in a certain way. In his opinion, "You don't begin dancing until you begin doing it correctly. You are either dancing or you are struggling." He says he struggles quite a bit and is still unsure how to overcome the

negativity he experiences with ballet despite his progress in the technique as an Irish dancer breaking into the concert dance scene. There are high standards to meet, insecurities to expose, and eyes to watch the disaster unfold. Blackstone, Felsinger, and Johnson shared with me that it is hard to work at your optimum when you don't know how to connect with the movement, can't find your confidence, and don't feel like you are even able to dance – and you are a supposed to be a dancer!

When you're feeling most negative about your ballet practice, find comfort in knowing that there are more holistic approaches to be taken that may save you from countless moments of ballet-stricken grief. A good place to start is to realize that ballet, despite some people's opinion, is not every thing, and you do not have to train to be Romeo's Juliet or a fantastical Prince Charming. If you love to dance, there is so much out there for you to explore and do that goes beyond the realms of ballet. It is also good to recognize your strengths and give them value. It is all right to remember that you are a rock-star in another dance form. Of course, there is the view that ballet is superior to other dance mediums, but that does not mean this perspective is correct or is something you should take to heart.

Something that may be of help is to remember that you can bring your style and passion for other dance forms into your ballet. Infuse your training with what you do best: being yourself. If you are spicy, spice-up your ballet. The technique is not simply positions and lines. Just because ballet makes you insecure does not mean you should allow yourself to shy away from performing in class and experiencing the movement. Ballet is a form of dance, after all, which means you are allowed to dance—you have permission! "Just be confident," said Que Ward, a junior dance major. Don't be embarrassed by your skill set. Everyone is on a different level and has something individual to share. Allow yourself to bring your understanding of your body and other movement techniques into your ballet training and don't be intimidated by what you think other dancers have over you. You are valid as an artist just the way you are and being confident in your contributions to the dance will allow you to channel your energy in a positive direction. You may even surprise yourself and begin to enjoy ballet and at least benefit from the challenge of making it your own.

Many of the dancers I talked with said that the way they get around the pitfalls of a bad ballet class is to focus less on the mirror and more on turning class into a performance, so that the ballet combinations that frustrate them most feel more like dancing and less like a train-wreck that may send them off the deep end. "I feel best when I am performing and not when I'm thinking about trying to point my feet better," Felsinger told me. She described how looking at ballet as movement-for-movement-sake, instead of a strict exercise, allows her to embody a state of expressiveness that makes ballet more natural, while also giving her the chance to stress less about the things that may be bothering her that day, like back pain, the tightness of her hips, or the insecurities that arrive from trying to make the human body a perfect, visionary, ballet machine. The technique may feel rigid to you or highlight your physical structure in a way that is displeasing, but if you look at class work as just another chance to move and build strength it may take away the stigma of trying to do complicated ballet steps.

Plus, you need to remember that everyone's body is different. You do not have to feel as if you have to please everyone else all the time. Allow yourself to focus on your individual needs. Take class for you. It is not about anyone else in that

moment. There is relevance in working towards your own goals. This means that you can take initiative by finding a teacher that suits your needs or finding the strength to personalize your ballet practice. There is much to gain from ballet, and the benefits will be greater if you give yourself the permission to really make ballet class a time for your own self-development instead of waging an emotional war that few dancers can honestly win. Do not empower your negative emotions. Be confident in yourself and your own journey as a dancer.

Once you begin to take class for yourself, credit your abilities, and train in a dedicated, positive way, it will be easier for you to get rid of the ballet blues. If class still seems unmanageable, you can try looking at ballet through the eyes of Charlotte Young, who began taking ballet in college and never really liked it at all. But once she discovered how powerful a strength-training tool it could be, ballet's importance became really clear. As Young and the other dancers described, ballet is crucial to their dancing and is something they will continue to do past college. The mechanics of ballet are so relatable and useful to other techniques that it can really improve your practice in all of your dance forms and provide a foundation for artistic freedom. Every dancer I talked with said that they felt stronger when they were taking ballet. It has a way of aligning the body and creating core-stability. If nothing else, it is a challenge for the mind and body that will contribute to your health, teach you the value of discipline, and expand your movement vocabulary. So, if you are still timid about taking ballet class, try seeing ballet as a means to boost your own strength and power as a dancer.

Chin up fellow ugly duckling of a ballet dancer! This dance form may not be your specialty, but there are many healthy solutions to the ballet blues dilemma. A positive perspective and little self-love will help you feel a better outside of your comfort-zone, grow to find joy in ballet class, and even reach new heights in your dancing. In writing this, I push myself to conquer my own obstacles and inspire others to put the benefits of taking ballet class above their insecurities. I encourage dancers of all genres to continue to take ballet class, in college and past graduation. Although it may hurt our feelings sometimes, there is more to gain from the practice than from what comes of giving up on yourself.

Maybe we can't get rid of the traditional black leotard-pink tights combo or wear socks to every class while in the university, but we can dispel our pessimism and infuse courage into our dancing. As Young told me, you should go into class with an open-mind, energy, and commitment. "Dance," she says, "is beautiful no matter how you express it." And from what I can tell, ballet will only make you a stronger dancer, artist, and person.

Natalie Johnson is an Indiana native. She will graduate in the spring of 2012 from UC, Irvine with a B.F.A. in Choreography and Performance as a Regent Scholar. After graduation she is moving to New York City to intern with dance photographer Lois Greenfield and begin her journey as a performing artist, choreographer, and photographer.

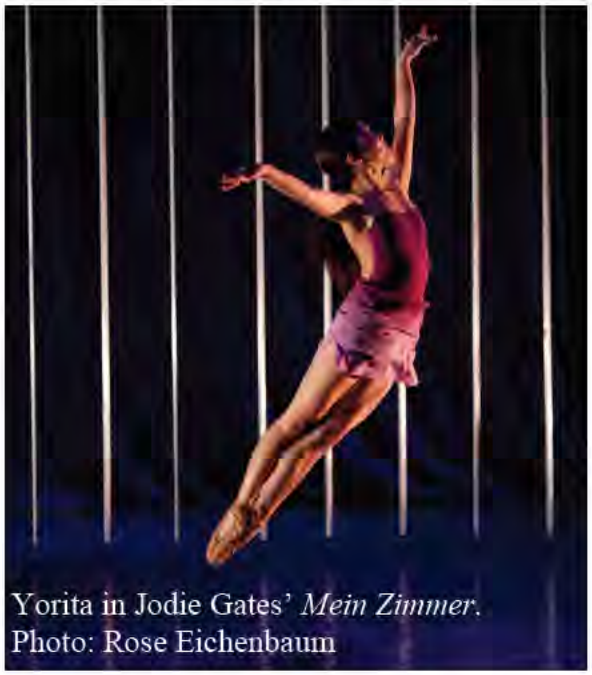
Is there a Ballet Life after College?

If you're looking for versatility and knowledge to round out your artistic life, more education can help, not hinder the prospects of a dancer—even in the rarefied world of ballet.

by Andie Yorita

It was in April of 2008 when I thought my career was over. I had been accepted into UC Irvine as a dance major and, at my parents' urging, I was going. *I should be ecstatic, right? Nope. Instead, I thought I might as well go find a new major.* This isn't a good way to begin a new chapter in any person's life. However, three years later, I am still a dance major, still wanting to pursue dance as a profession, and now I view the dance world in a new light.

Since the age of three, I have been primarily trained in classical ballet under the R.A.D. syllabus. Growing up in this classical ballet world, I would hear of many young ballet dancers going away to year-round training programs such as SAB, PNB, or the Harid Conservatory. Some even went abroad to places like the Royal Ballet School in London or Canada's National Ballet School in Toronto. From these training programs, most of these dancers would go straight into apprenticeships, second companies, or even get major company contracts. Since my parents did not want me to go away to a year-round training program, my whole life revolved around getting into a professional ballet company immediately after I graduated from high school.



Yorita in Jodie Gates' *Mein Zimmer*.
Photo: Rose Eichenbaum

My immersion in the ballet world was the main contributing factor to this need to go directly into a company at a young age. It seems to me that the ballet world gives a bad name to dancers attending college because the prevailing advice is to join a company while young. It made me wonder why the ballet world looked down on dancers getting higher education. In America the arts are overshadowed by other pursuits that are more lucrative, as opposed to other parts of the world, where the arts are more accepted. In Asia or Europe the arts receive support from the government. Is its importance rooted in ballet's history because the art form started in European royal courts, where former monarchies placed a high value on it? Ballet in America is where the European and American cultures intersect, which is confusing to those who would like to pursue this art form when they are considering it as a career. Studying a European-based art in an American setting creates a culture clash that can lead to sticky situations, such as deciding whether college is best for one's career.

This brings me back to my experience at UCI and how it has broadened my view of the dance world, as well as given me knowledge and maturity to proceed into my career. My first year at UCI

was a year full of doubt and transitioning. The first quarter for me was the hardest. I came to UCI feeling as though I had lost all chance of dancing in a ballet company. I began to take classes for other majors to find what else would interest me in a different career path (where I found that I am not a science person). Following advice from my mom, I told myself that I would stay in the dance major at least until the end of my first year to make sure I really did want to stop dancing. As the year went on, the UCI dance department slowly grew on me and finally in the spring of 2009 I began to become reacquainted with my passion for the art of dance.

Since that first year I feel that I have grown due to the influence of the UCI dance department. I don't know if it is because of my personality or because of my ballet background, but one of the main culture shocks when I began my university studies was being asked to have an opinion. In my training I was always told what to do, how to do it, and what it should look like. It was very black and white, with rules such as: in an ensemble the left dancers should always cross in front of the right dancers; if a teacher tells you to do something, you do it, and if there is difficulty doing it, you find a way to make it work without question; your hip must stay placed when you développé à la seconde; you must not sickle your foot; and everything should look as though it is effortless. I was used to my ballet life being very structured. There was always a grand pas de deux, followed by a male solo, then the female solo, ending with a coda.

These rules, structures, and black and white-ness were taken apart when I came to UCI. The first time I was told by Professor Loretta Livingston "dancer's choice" I felt like a fish out of water. I remember thinking to myself, "She wants me to what? Does that mean I can choose whether I want to do this combination or not?" I had no idea what that meant. I later found it meant that dancers are allowed to add their own artistic choices in how they want to execute and highlight the movement. Along with learning modern technique and having my own artistic opinion, I also got to take Professor Sheron Wray's jazz class, which has changed my view on the jazz genre. Before, I thought of jazz dance as all sparkly bras, booty shorts and leg tilts. However, I was able to learn from Professor Wray a whole other technique that requires coordination and musicality. I was even given the opportunity to take hip hop classes through her efforts to bring hip hop to the academic setting. Even in ballet, which I thought I knew a lot about, my eyes were opened to a whole other realm: contemporary ballet. Before coming to UCI I had no idea who William Forsythe or Nacho Duato were, nor had I heard of companies such as La La La Human Steps or Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. Through these different influences, I have been able to expand my movement vocabulary, and I found that classical ballet is not the only style of dancing that I would like to do.

Being in a college setting forces you to go outside your little comfort box. You are not only required to take at least a year of ballet, modern, and jazz technique classes but you also must take other academic related courses. For example, I would have never voluntarily taken a choreography class, since creating movement has never been something that has interested me. But now, I have a better understanding of different choreographic devices that could help me as a dancer when I work with different choreographers. Also, I would have been performing ballet without knowing its background from the dance history series and facts such as George Balanchine being influenced by the African aesthetic. None of this is taught when you are learning a ballet; they just make sure you know the steps.

Taking such academic courses helps dancers gain knowledge about what is it they spend so much time and energy practicing. Though I still feel uncomfortable vocalizing my opinions, these academic classes have allowed me to open my mind and not be afraid to follow my curiosity.

This is just my story and my experience that I went through to get to where I am today. However, there are other ballet dancers that have felt the same as they began their journey at UCI. Irene Liu, a third year undergraduate primarily trained in the Vaganova classical ballet style, had an experience similar to mine. When she decided to go to college, she felt that she was "…seen as a failure in the eyes of my teacher and thus for myself." Now after two years at UCI, Liu's view has changed about college, that it is "Not so bad. It has given me the ability to find out more about myself."

Though both Liu and I entered college with an apprehensive attitude, there are other ballet specialists who have felt the opposite, such as UCI alumna Shannon Quirk and second year graduate student Bondy Owens. They both felt that they had immense support from their teachers and those surrounding them in continuing their studies in college. Quirk's decision was clear, saying that, "College was never debatable really. More like just a fact of life I guess—you graduate high school you go to college….College was just the next thing I had to do."

The support Quirk received was similar to Owens, who was a professional in Los Angeles Ballet for nearly four seasons. "Many people in the ballet world that I have encountered have supported me or praised me for going to school in the way that I did," she says. Owens, who went to UCLA for her undergraduate degree before dancing professionally, originally planned on delaying college because she felt that "dancers had to start their careers as soon as possible." However, with a turn of events she ended up at UCLA and, looking back, she believes it helped her become more well-rounded as a dancer. For example when she worked with guest choreographer Jennifer Backhaus at LAB, Owens was picked for solo roles in the ballet. Owens thinks, "It might be because I had exposure to many different types of dance training at UCLA." This shows that companies and choreographers are looking for dancers who can do more than just classical ballet, thus proving that ballet is starting to head in a new direction.

This leads me to my closing topic, that recently there has been a shift in the ballet world in terms of what a ballet dancer needs to have a long and successful career. Quirk stated, "I think [the view from the ballet world] has changed since I was younger. It is more accepted—I wouldn't say completely, but [college] isn't viewed as completely taboo." She has found that some people in the ballet world do have an old school view on college and how it is something that is not conducive to one's career. Liu has noticed that the ballet world is "more accepting of older dancers who have a better understanding and maturity" of their bodies as well as having knowledge of the dance world. Agreeing with Liu, Quirk adds that, "There are very few, if any, companies in the world that do strictly classic works anymore. Dancers need to be more versatile than in the past…The maturity factor…is essential in working a contemporary concept, since it isn't just a ballet mistress placing you in a line. There is more of a process, which I feel is lost when you are younger."

All in all I feel that attending a college such as UCI has broadened my knowledge base and expanded my movement vocabulary to make me into the more versatile dancer that companies are

beginning to seek. I strongly agree with Quirk when she says that, "Realistically, your dance career will end, and something will have to take its place, and college is a way to prepare you for that inevitable." Meanwhile, Quirk is still dancing and performing in various productions in the U.S. and, come audition season, she plans on auditioning for companies in the U.S. as well as in Europe. As for Owens, after receiving her MFA, she would like to teach in the community college system or possibly a university. Liu still wants to follow her passion to perform in a professional contemporary ballet company after she graduates. Through these three dancers, along with my experience, it is obvious that a college degree will not hinder a ballet dancer's work possibilities.

Special thanks to those interviewed: Irene Liu, Shannon Quirk, and Bondy Owens

Andrea Yorita is from Irvine, California and will graduate from the University of California, Irvine in June 2012. Her plan after graduation is to keep dancing, hopefully in a ballet or contemporary ballet company.

Yorita with Jeremy Zapanta in Jodie Gate's Mein Zimmer.
Photo: Rose Eichenbaum

Making the Transition

Moving from your hometown dance studio to a university dance department can provide lots of challenges. Here's how several dance majors successfully started to take advantage of what their "next chapters" had to offer.

by Janelle Villanueva

If you're in college, you've gone through some kind of major change to get there. Many college students transition from living at home to living in a dorm, along with managing a changing schedule, with classes meeting from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.! Young artists who decide they want to pursue a dance major at a university deal with even more transitions. These students are faced with learning to manage the differences between a dance studio and a college dance department. College dance departments bring together dancers from different types of backgrounds. Some students hail from large, competing dance studios, while others may come from small, family-oriented studios. Either way, there will be differences you may or may not like. I am going to explore what these differences are when one is trained in a dance studio with a strong ballet program by using my own personal experiences, along with those of freshmen who are new to UC Irvine's dance department and upperclassmen who have managed the transition.

I came from a fairly large studio that offered a variety of dance genres with most students taking ballet, hip-hop, and/or Tahitian. I trained in ballet at this studio for 11 years before I went to college. My peers and I had plenty of opportunities to perform at competitions, community shows, the annual *Nutcracker* production and the end-of-the-year recital. These performances demanded many rehearsal hours, which meant that if I was not in school, I was dancing. I spent so many hours dancing, and eventually teaching that the dance studio became a second home to me; my peers were like sisters, my teachers like mothers, and the staff and friends' parents like aunts and uncles. After being with this studio for 11 years, it was time for me to go to college. When I finally came to the University of California, Irvine as a freshman, I quickly realized that the dance department was nothing like my old dance studio.

I was excited to start a new chapter in my life at UCI, but being thrown into an environment full of unfamiliar things made me yearn for everything at home, including all the relationships I had formed at my old dance studio. Although my new peers and teachers were friendly, I did not know where I belonged in this new community, and I did not know where to find help or just company when I needed it. Fourth-year student Andrea Yorita remembers feeling similarly when she first came to UCI. She felt intimidated when she first became a part of a dance department because, all of a sudden, she no longer had the close-knit community she had at her old studio and no longer had the teacher who helped guide her through her training. For Andrea and me, these feelings are things of the past, but there are freshmen who are experiencing them now. One of the freshmen I interviewed said that she missed her friends from her old studio and that she missed having a teacher who knew her really well and gave her corrections that were unique to her needs. Despite these feelings, she is aware that there is a family-like community within the dance department, and she is hopeful that she will find her place in it.

Villanueva in Tong Wang's *In the Krapfen Woods*. Photo: Rose Eichenbaum

Andrea, Irene Liu – a third-year dance major – and I have all found our niches within this community and agree that being a part of it is an integral part of one's college experience in the dance department. Irene said that once she began to develop friendships with her peers, the transition from the studio to college became a lot easier. Andrea mentioned that during her freshmen year when she was stressed about school and rehearsals, one of the seniors at the time let her know that what she was experiencing was normal for a dance major and that she would be fine. Knowing she was not alone and that she would get through rough times was encouraging.

Andrea, Irene, and I discussed the idea of having a mentorship program for new dance majors. There is a very supportive and friendly community within UCI's dance department and, although new students may be aware of it, many of them may feel like they are outsiders looking in. With a mentorship program, we can help bring freshmen and transfer students into the community faster. They will still experience some struggles transitioning to college, but at least they can have a support system made of peers who have experienced what they are going through.

Another benefit of having upperclassmen as mentors is that new students have the opportunity to meet experienced students that they might not have met without the program. New students, especially freshmen, may not currently interact with seniors very often because freshmen are usually taking pre-requisites to the classes seniors are already taking. Irene spoke about how she met some seniors near the end of her freshmen year, and how she wished she had met them

earlier. Everyone in the department has something good to offer to another person, and by having a mentorship program, both new and experienced students can get the most out of our dance community.

This program can help freshmen deal with other struggles they may be experiencing during their first year. I remember wanting to go back home, not only because I missed everyone at my old studio, but also because I felt like my technique was declining. I rehearsed a lot less in classical ballet than I did when I was in high school. My studio participated in several competitions and always brought classical ballet pieces. I was constantly rehearsing in that genre, which is very rigorous and technically demanding. There are many performance opportunities at UCI, but the ones that I was aware of were not in my genre. I felt like my dancing was becoming worse because of college, and I considered picking another major or going to a state school near my home so I could continue dancing at my old dance studio.

The two upperclassmen I spoke to shared the same feelings their first year. Irene was trained in the Vaganova technique and adopted the standards of her teachers. "[After high school] if you go to a company, you've succeeded," she says. "If you go to school, you've failed." This mentality caused Irene to distance herself from the department and not engage in its community. Andrea grew up with this same mentality and considered switching majors her freshman year. She felt that if she could not succeed as a dancer, she should pursue another field in which she could succeed as a student at a university.

Thankfully, both Irene and Andrea decided to continue pursuing a dance major. Although the training offered at a college dance department may not seem as rigorous to some who have come from ballet studios, it offers many things that a ballet studio does not. At UCI, dance majors have the opportunity to work with a variety of choreographers, which can expand one's knowledge about dance. Irene, Andrea, and I mostly performed classical ballet repertoire before coming to college. We all agreed that we have gained a lot of new perspectives on dance from working with different choreographers. Andrea commented that during her stay at UCI, she learned that people can dance anywhere, not just on a conventional proscenium stage. Something that was new to me when I began rehearsing with graduate choreographers at UCI was the collaborative process of creating a piece. Both of the freshmen I interviewed were given the opportunity to work with graduate choreographers this year, and both said that they enjoy this different process of choreographing and rehearsing.

Hopefully, despite the difficulties of transitioning from the dance studio to the dance department, new students will stick to their major, keep dancing, and reap the benefits of being a dance major. Not only does going to a college dance department offer the potential to become a part of a great community, it helps students to create networks and gain information from each other and from faculty about the professional dance world. It also enriches students' knowledge about other aspects of dance apart from performance, such as dance history. Life is full of changes and transitions, and although they may be hard, the experiences strengthen us.

Janelle Villanueva is from the San Francisco Bay Area. She will be graduating in 2013 from UC, Irvine. After graduation, she plans to audition for dance companies while looking into other job opportunities in economics or education.

Undergraduate Profile:

Bobby Amamizu, fresh from his two years with Cirque du Soleil

What happens when you get a job offer too tempting to refuse before you graduate? Here's how one dance major handled the lure of Las Vegas

by Caitlin Hicks

At age twenty-two, most university students are gearing up for graduation, ready to begin the first stages of new careers in their respective fields. Twenty-two-year-old dance major Bobby Amamizu is also looking forward to graduating, from University of California, Irvine, but he'll be entering the field with quite a bit of professional experience—Bobby has had an agent since the age of ten, and, over the years, he's been involved in various dance companies as well as music videos and the 2009 update of *Fame*. I met Bobby in rehearsal for Dance Visions this quarter when he returned from his most recent employment: two years performing in Las Vegas as a cast member of Cirque du Soleil's *Viva ELVIS*.

Having been completely blown away by several Cirque productions myself, I was extremely curious as to what life behind the scenes was like, as well as how one even managed to land that kind of job. To be a part of the surreal and magical spectacle that Cirque stands for is a dream that performers from a wide variety of disciplines can spend years chasing, so I was surprised to learn in interviewing Bobby that he had never even seen a Cirque show prior to his audition.

"It started out with my competition at Youth American Grand Prix," said Bobby, who attended the New York competition in April of 2008 with UCI professor Israel "El" Gabriel. In May, a casting director in the audience contacted Bobby through YAGP to say that Cirque was interested in his movement and to request additional footage for his personal "Cirque file." In August, he was invited to audition for two brand new Cirque productions—*Viva ELVIS* and a more vaudeville-tap show called *Banana Shpeel*. He made it through both grueling auditions as a finalist, but *ELVIS* called him first in January of 2009. In June of that year, Bobby joined the rest of the cast in Montreal for an intense, six-month creation process, opening in Vegas the following February.

Amamizu. Photo by: Aaron Felske

For Bobby, who was accustomed to the brief terms of employment characteristic of L.A. dance gigs, working for Cirque was a big adjustment. With ten to twelve shows a

week and minimal time off, he estimated that he performed in over 900 shows during his two-year contract—jokingly remarking that I would probably never hear him complain about *Nutcracker* season again. On a more serious note, he stressed that this nearly nonstop intensity can be quite injurious and that constant self-motivation to spend extra hours taking care of one's body is necessary in order to avoid burnout.

One of the unfortunate realities of working for non-dancers is that they often don't realize how athletic dance can be; as a result, it's up to the dancer to make sure he or she maintains the level of fitness necessary to perform safely and successfully. "They didn't know what kind of equipment we needed or conditions to work in," Bobby told me. "Like having class every day…They would only offer us once a week, and it's not always ballet—ballet we only had, maybe, once a month." To keep up his technique, he went to outside ballet classes three times a week. It's a tribute to his work ethic and standard of discipline that he put in these extra hours because, on top of the already rigorous rehearsal and performance schedule, there was a lot of working overtime. "It was non-union," he explained. "So we would sometimes rehearse from ten in the morning to eleven at night." And this kind of schedule wouldn't always guarantee a dinner break. It was becoming clear to me that behind the immense sparkle of Cirque's productions, there's an equivalent, if not greater, amount of sweat. Bobby was quick to point out, however, that all this work was done as a team. "You become a family," he said of his fellow cast members, performers ranging in age from nineteen to thirty-eight from a wide array of backgrounds, including Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and Broadway's *The Lion King*. The chance to work with all these artists was one of the most valuable aspects of the experience for Bobby, and they keep in touch now that he's back at UCI.

When I asked Bobby why he came back to UCI given his success in the professional world, he admitted that "UCI was always just hanging in the back of my mind." Having graduated from the Orange County High School of the Arts when he was sixteen, Bobby started his studies at UCI in 2006; almost six years later, he's finally ready to get his degree. At the moment, his post-graduation goal is to spend some time in a ballet company. "I've always been curious what kind of lifestyle that is," he said. He plans to continue working in L.A. as well, but points out that "if you're going to be doing double tours, you don't want to do that in your late thirties or forties…You want to do it now."

It's the rare dancer who can leap from commercial work into the realm of professional ballet and back again, but for Bobby, versatility has always been at the center of his training. When asked if he had any advice for aspiring dancers, his immediate answer was "Be well-rounded." The more you can do, he says, the easier you are to hire. For graduating dance majors, he also stressed the importance of staying motivated and disciplined once the structure of set daily classes is removed. Finally, he offered the reminder that "it's okay to get cut," as dancers will often have to audition for many jobs before they actually get their first. As Bobby leaves UCI for his next employment, I offer him my congratulations, good luck, and thanks—he has been an inspiring example for the rest of us, a pleasure to watch, and a joy to dance with.

Caitlin Hicks is a dance major from Cardiff-by-the-Sea in San Diego. She plans to graduate from UC, Irvine in 2015. After graduation, she hopes join a company and dance professionally.

The Upstaging of Latinos on Broadway

Can you see yourself reflected onstage? For Latinos, it hasn't always been a pretty picture on the Great White Way.

by Felix Marchany

The Latino culture undoubtedly has a lot to offer to the fields of music, dance, poetry, theater, and the like. According to Joanne Pottlitzer, director, translator, and producer of major Latin American works and author of *Hispanic Theater in the United States and Puerto Rico*, "Theater is a reflection of the society that creates it and Hispanic theater is no exception. Hispanic theater in the United States… is as diverse as the people it portrays (Pottlitzer 1)." But there currently seems to be a gap between the possibilities and the number of Latino theatre works that appear in major venues. Broadway, for instance, is not providing a stage for the showcasing of Latino talent or its culture; rather it often perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces prejudices against Latinos.

The absence of new product representing the community is the root of conflict between the Latino actor and Broadway. Other minorities have fared better. Shows such as *Dreamgirls*, *The Color Purple*, and *Ain't Misbehavin'* highlight black themes and obviously require black actors. As a result, these productions promote black talent and encourage black participation in Broadway musicals. Thus, there are spots for black actors on the American musical stage. In contrast, there are no shows on the Broadway stage that promote positive Latino themes. Instead negative perspectives create a sense of Latino "otherness" and drive the Latino performer further away from being Broadway-bound.

Of course, it would be ludicrous to say that there are absolutely no shows in the history of the American musical that have utilized Latin characters. "No one can deny that *Zoot Suit* was the most successful Chicano play ever written, and that it was a great success in Los Angeles", reports Jon Dominic Rossini, author of *Ethnic Theatricality: Stage Subjectivity in Contemporary Chicana/o and Latino Drama* and graduate of Duke University's department of English (Rossini 72). In his 1978 play, Luis Valdez weaves together the real-life events involving the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial and the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943.

The show opened to great reviews in Los Angeles, but failed miserably when it transferred to Broadway in 1979. Rossini believes it was because "this theatrical event was predicated on the presence of a Chicano community willing and eager to see itself displayed on the theatrical stage" (Rossini 72). The Los Angeles crowd truly appreciated the work because it was part of their cultural heritage being presented onstage, not, of course, a representation of all Latinos. The New York audience, not being fully Latino or understanding the Latino culture and its events, must have felt threatened to see Latinos dressed as thugs murdering one another. Rather than leaving culturally enlightened, the New York audience might have left uninterested and traumatized, with prejudices and stereotypes of the Latino in tact.

Going onto larger scale productions and diving deeper into Latino stereotypes manifested in musical works, the highly praised 1957 production of *West Side Story* takes center stage. Though a beloved classic, *West Side Story* is really a production of

"racist discourse of Latin otherness in the U.S. (Sandoval-Sánchez 63)," claims Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez, a Latino advocate and author of *José, Can You See?*. Nevertheless, the show is one of the rare musicals that showcased Latin talent on the larger scale of a lavish production.

Despite *West Side Story's* epic showcasing, its material and what it does to the Latin image makes the production an enemy of the Latin performer. For one thing, the Puerto Ricans, cast as gang members named the Sharks, provide yet another instance in which Latin people are portrayed as antagonistic gang members in a battle for territory. They are trying to "get in" and assimilate into American life. "Working outside… leads to a notion of marginalized and criminalized [identities] as imagined historically by Anglo culture" (Sandoval-Sánchez 64). Secondly, since the creative team of the production was entirely white, the central perspective is that of the Jets, the American gang that is threatened by the "PR's" presence on their territory. This is evident in the way that the movie opens up with phrases like, "We always walk tall, we're the Jets, the greatest," and "'cause every Puerto Rican's a lousy chicken" to set up the characters' identities.

Furthermore, in "America," the rhythmically energetic and show stopping number, "Anita enunciates Puerto Rican reality as an underdeveloped country with all kinds of natural disasters, socioeconomic and demographic problems, and crime" (Sandoval-Sánchez 73). By using phrases such as "Island of tropic diseases… Always the population growing… And the bullets flying" (Sandoval-Sánchez 73), the Jets seem to be favored and familiar, despite being gang members as well.

Jumping forward in Broadway history we have the arrival of Michael Bennett's classic *A Chorus Line*. Though this work was almost 20 years after *West Side Story*, the perpetuation of Latino stereotypes is still present in the characters of Paul and Diana, who are of Puerto Rican descent and the only two Latinos in the show. In this production, the problem with the Latin characters of Paul and Diana are their personalities and the way in which they identify themselves. At one end of the spectrum, Paul is one of the three gay protagonists who lacks self-confidence and is undergoing an identity crisis. Sandoval feels that "although Paul has challenged and surpassed the stereotype that all Puerto Ricans are Black… he perpetuated the stereotype that all gays are sissy and nelly" (Sandoval-Sánchez 98). This stereotype is sustained throughout his monologue as he confesses his dark secret of being a drag queen and how he degraded himself. In contrast to Paul, Diana is the loud, outspoken, and very proud Puerto Rican who freely announces her ethnic roots. For Sandoval, this means "Diana can be seen as a stereotypical Puerto Rican dropout…" (Sandoval-Sánchez 93). Two problem-stricken characters from yet another Broadway show that put the Latino community in a negative light. And although it can be argued that all characters in *A Chorus Line* are problem-stricken, only the characters of Paul and Diana reinforce ethnic stereotypes through their actions and dialogue.

Finally we arrive at some hope for the Latino performer. Lin-Manuel Miranda, a composer and lyricist of Broadway shows who is on a quest to change the pre-dominantly white run industry, attempted what had never been done in the history of the American musical. His revolutionary *In The Heights* opened on Broadway in 2008 with one purpose; to stage a show of Latin family values that puts forth a positive image to counteract stereotypes on Broadway. Of course this would not be easy with the already established labels of

Latinos on Broadway. Miranda, being of Puerto Rican heritage, centered his production on the principles of home, family, and finding where you belong. "The musical is set in Washington Heights, a Latino enclave in Upper Manhattan teeming with graffiti artists, hairdressers, [and] close-knit families…", reports Charlotte Stoudt of the *Los Angeles Times*.

The reason *In The Heights* has become a revolutionary landmark in Broadway history is because of the portrayal of its characters. It is not a product of what white people think Latinos are, but rather a tasteful representation of Latino culture because Miranda himself is Latino. It would be ridiculous to think that Miranda would do an injustice to the Latino culture by falsely representing it onstage in a negative light. "In a Hispanic [show], the point of view, how people feel, the way they treat each other, are not American" (Pottlitzer 33). Therefore, Miranda's characters showcase the Latino perspective and are not forced to portray injurious stereotypes. "'*Heights*' celebrates the immigrants' search for an authentic home… it's a universal story, parents sacrificing so their children can have a better life" (Miranda in Stoudt). Breaking boundaries and crushing stereotypes, *In the Heights* has become a victory for the Latino.

Broadway is not providing a stage for the showcasing of Latino talent or its culture; rather it is subliminally perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing prejudices against Latinos. There is an explicit deficiency in wholesome material being produced. Despite the already established stereotypes and harmful prejudices against the Latino community, there is an optimistic view towards the future of the Latino on Broadway. With shows such as *In the Heights* to start the trend, we might begin to see more true depictions of the Latino community in shows, which will hopefully promote an increase in Latino talent. The standards are changing.

Marchany performing in Sheron Wray's *Copy , Right?* Photo: Rose Eichenbaum

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A Living, Breathing Process

As a dancer, you sometimes get the chance to contribute to a choreographer's process in a very personal and profound way. Here's how one dance major reacted to the journey.

by Katy Felsinger

Somehow, we all ended up with tears in our eyes. As our fellow dancer ran to each of us in the space, almost pleading to be heard, we couldn't help but be affected. She explained how her mom was in the hospital, suddenly everything wasn't what she thought it was, and people who she thought she could trust were turning on her. And while she described all of this to us, she was becoming increasingly exhausted and disoriented—crumbling before our very eyes. And all we did was stand there; eventually letting the tears run down our faces.

This was just one of many powerful moments that unfolded in rehearsal throughout the eight-month-long process leading up to an MFA thesis concert by Julia Cost in the spring of 2011. The prompt was simple: one dancer, Amy Quanbeck, was to describe a dream that she had a few nights before, and while she was doing so, the rest of the dancers would surround her, standing and listening. As she told the story, Cost prompted her to move throughout the space, addressing each one of us, and progressively increasing in speed and urgency. What resulted was more beautifully moving than we ever could have imagined—we saw the way Quanbeck was experiencing her dream so deeply, as if it had truly affected her, and because of this, we too were affected.

Rehearsals filled with moments like this reminded me that we were not merely rehearsing steps or sequences for a dance concert; rather, we were involving ourselves and our own life experiences in the creation of the work. Cost created an environment of collaboration in the choreographic process unlike any other process I had been a part of before. And it is because of this involvement that I and the seven other dancers working with her were able to gain so much from working with her, and create something that had all of our voices within it.

Cost says that she would not be choreographing if she had not discovered the richness of working in collaborative ways with dancers. "My whole reason for sharing a dance is to show something about being human through the incredible histories and imaginations of the people I work with. Dancers are vessels for communicating the complexities of our existence, and so continually researching the complexities of who they are and empowering their distinct voices in process greatly heightens the possibility for having a dance communicate powerfully onstage—much more than dictating to the dancers what to do and having them imitate, memorize, regurgitate through muscle memory."

But the question is: how did Cost create an environment that was truly "collaborative"? While the term collaborative can mean many different things to different people, I found her answer to be especially clear and honest in relation to her role as a choreographer facilitating a collaborative process. She explained that, "as a choreographer I come to the table with something rich and largely unopened for people to explore, and then get everyone to dive into a mass of experiments, discussions, and movement research, working continuously to question, engage, empower, and draw things out of each individual. I can tell whether the process is successful (and whether it is becoming

collaborative) as the dancers begin digging their teeth into the work along with me, investigating their own inquiries, revealing new sides of themselves, discussing the work candidly, and feeling empowered to move the research in entirely new directions. Then I know we are getting somewhere."

Dancer Rebecca Levy felt that the creation of Cost's thesis was indeed a very involved process. "It was very personal," Levy reflected, "and what arose came just as much from what we were interested in and researching as the ideas that Cost brought to rehearsal." Quanbeck agreed, saying that she felt as if our voices were always heard, but at the same time, Cost did a good job of taking in all of our feedback, and then making informed decisions about where to go next or what to do. And Cost did not just work in this way by chance—it was a conscious decision on her part to constantly look for new ways to engage people, to emphasize that any answer is a correct answer and allow dancers to express any idea—she believes that "your ideas are valued—as long as you are invested." For Cost, working in such a deeply involved way with the dancers is the *only* way for her. In every rehearsal, she tries to find new paths to move towards her goals and is excited to see her cast members find their own strategies when they choreograph, empowering their dancers and bringing out unrevealed sides of them. "The possibilities for working in this way are endless," she says, "as long as you remain true to the underlying values."

While Cost keeps the end point in mind throughout the process, she leaves herself open to possibilities that could completely transform the piece. For example, she stated that, "if I'm drilling towards some preconceived vision of 'perfection' in November for a show in March, I'm ignoring so many possibilities. I see product as just another slice of process. When the show comes, I want the dancers to still be researching in a very real way… the task is to make a well crafted collection of things that is very much living, breathing, and changing."

So, one might ask, what is the value of this type of process? I would argue that it is one of the most meaningful dance experiences that I have ever had. Each time that I entered the rehearsal space, I not only felt inspired to create but felt that I was a part of a community that was growing, experiencing, and creating something *together*. I believe that is one of the most empowering feelings one can have. Cost emphasizes the importance of forming close relationships with her dancers both within and outside of the rehearsal space. Through shared experiences, we were able to then create more specifics to shape the piece. And as Quanbeck explained, "the process would have been different with different group of dancers—but they too would need to build community. And it takes time to build that kind of trust." Levy is in agreement with this idea, explaining that the piece simply would have been different had it been a different group of dancers, because the process that Cost creates is so very personal. Cost used our own life experiences to shape the work, and with other performers, it simply would have transformed into a new and unique product.

Quanbeck and Levy agree that working with Cost on her thesis has influenced them personally, in both their performance and choreographic pursuits. Quanbeck has noticed since working with Cost that she is driven to find real tasks for herself when performing, instead of just "faking it"—she is drawn to the idea that you can do real tasks on stage, and that *thought* manifested in the body can be so interesting to watch. Levy, since working with Cost, has noticed herself taking a more collaborative approach to choreographing.

While before she may have simply come into rehearsal and taught her dancers movement, now she finds herself giving her dancers tasks, and allowing their individuality to reveal itself. One dancer, in exploring something that Levy had presented, seemed to become more of herself within the movement, and Levy was drawn to how beautiful that was. From there, she was more able to see how she wanted to go about working with that specific dancer. Levy realizes now that she may not have decided to work in this manner had she not been so deeply influenced by Cost's explorative, experimental process.

While Cost had a very open idea of what she wanted her thesis performance to be, she did know that she wanted to create " a patchwork of chapters of dance work, each investigating different textures and emotions, that would take the viewer to many places in our human experience." In doing so, she wanted to create something both personal and relatable, so that it did not just mean something to her and the dancers, but that the audience might be able to connect their own life experiences to it. After speaking with audience member Kim Bridgewater, it is clear to me that she did just that. At first, Bridgewater couldn't quite explain the feeling that she got from watching the thesis performance. She came to the conclusion that it was a sense of nostalgia because of the relationships between the dancers and "the way in which they danced so tenderly and coherently together." Bridgewater said that she could see and feel the friendships that existed between the people onstage and could relate to the interactions that occurred.

When I asked Cost what kind of art and dance she is drawn to, she said that she is interested in anything that evidences intelligence, care, and investment. She is interested in work that excavates some of the endless questions we ask, things we imagine, and landscapes of emotions, interactions, and places that we recall and discover. In her words, "After all, we are all human, so why not allow dance to explore all aspects of our human experience, leading us to build closer relationships, learn more about ourselves, and life in general." I think Cost is onto something—a way of creating dance that can radically affect the lives of all involved in creating, viewing, and reflecting on the work.

Katy Felsinger is originally from Carmel, California. She will be graduating in June 2012 with a BFA in Dance Performance and Choreography from UC Irvine. Upon graduation, she plans on moving to the Bay Area to immerse herself in its rich dance community.

Felsinger (2nd from R) with cast directed by Julia Cost

Music and the Choreographic Process

Should you use Lady Gaga, or maybe Mozart? Only the choreographer knows. Here's how to perform your own experiment.

by Marissa Brown

As a choreographer I am always looking for new ways to be inspired, to come up with new ideas and change up my movement patterns. Because I know music has a relationship to movement, I wanted to look at how music could help me explore new choreography by asking myself why it might be important to experiment with different styles of music during the choreographic process. In order to get a clear answer, I carried out a small study in which I had two dancers perform a phrase of my choreography to six music selections of different styles. I documented the process through video and writing and found some insightful results.

Brown in Donald McKayle's *Continents of Humanity*. Photo: Rose Eichenbaum

Before conducting my own research, I had the opportunity to interview Alex Ketley, an independent choreographer and director of The Foundry, a contemporary dance company based in San Francisco, and asked him why he uses a wide variety of music during his choreographic process. His response was: "I use music in rehearsals to alter the environment. To alter how people feel, and to bring different colors out in the work as people explore it." I love the idea that music works as an outside force that sets up a place for the dancer to live in, and that this place can change depending on the music, even while doing the same movement. Ketley also said that he plays with music to stay interested in the work he is producing. I know that there have been moments in my choreographic work when I have become bored or uninterested in what I am creating, and it's nice to hear how one choreographer overcomes this state through the use of music. I was interested to see if I found the same result in my research.

I worked with dancers Sarah Bauer and Diana Schoenfield. I taught them the same phrase and then individually had them perform it to six different songs. The music I used was: "After the Storm," by Mumford & Sons; "Judas," by Lady Gaga; "Icky Thump," by The White Stripes; "Down on Me," by Jeremih; "In a Sentimental Mood," by Duke Ellington; and "Die Fledermaus," by APM Orchestra. I told the dancers to take a moment to listen to the music and then respond to it with the given phrase. Once they went through all the music, I had them

take a moment to reflect and write down some thoughts on their experience.

From my results, I learned that there are many benefits to playing with different styles of music during the choreographic process. While watching the individual dancers perform the phrase to the different music selections, I began to notice changes in the movement with each song. This kept me consistently interested in the phrase I created, even after seeing it for the twelfth time in a row. I also began to pick out small nuances in the choreography added by the dancers that I liked and might ask them to continue to do. For example, the selections of music by Lady Gaga and Jeremih caused the dancers to have more spinal movement and articulation. As a choreographer I might like this movement of the spine and ask the dancers to incorporate it into the phrase with any selection of music.

It was also beneficial to look firsthand at how the dancers responded to performing the same phrase to different music selections. Both dancers found that a change in music affected their performance in one way or another. Sarah said, "The more upbeat [Lady Gaga] type beats caused me to speed up, I sometimes felt more out of control, because I was trying to hit certain movements sharper and harder without having practiced them that way first." As a choreographer, I can see this as a way of challenging the dancers. It provokes them to think on their feet, and from this, interesting and unexpected results can come about. Diana said, "The most amazing thing about this activity is realizing how the external force of music alters my internal state." She found that emotionally she felt different with each change in music, and this emotional change creates new possibilities for a choreographer to be inspired by.

It has become clear to me that there are many benefits in using a variety of styles of music during the choreographic process. With each musical change there is new life given to the choreography, and this opens up the possibilities and directions in which the work can be taken. Next time you are working on a piece I would suggest changing up the music, because you may find out something that you didn't know before and never expected.

Marissa Brown is from Livermore, California and will graduate with a BFA in choreography in the spring of 2012. She plans to continue to pursue dance and choreographic opportunities after graduation.

Brown in *Continents of Humanity*. Photo: Rose Eichenbaum

Myrtha as Mother, or "How to find Murderous Compassion in a Ballet"

Remember the vengeful vampire-like wilis in the second act of Giselle? They kill men for sport—or do they? If you look deeply into the character of the wili queen, you might just find out that viewers have the power to interpret Giselle any way they want.

by Elizabeth Mu

Giselle, Act II, with Eric Shah and Stephanie Orza at Inland Pacific Ballet. Photo: E.Y. Yanagi ©2007.

White tulle, ghostly synchronization, and spiteful dancing: these are what often characterize the wilis of *Giselle*. Having died unfulfilled before their wedding day, these women haunt the forests in the afterlife seeking men on which to exact their revenge. Together with Myrtha, their wili queen, they trap wandering men and dance them to death (Cordova 115). Since Myrtha actively promotes this vindictive behavior, she can reasonably be considered a character of great violence and cruelty. However, there is more to the wili queen than many audiences acknowledge. In the Royal Ballet's version of *Giselle*, Myrtha is not simply using the wilis to promote her own vengeful agenda. Marianela Nuñez's Myrtha seems to have a deep compassion for her followers, thus suggesting that she is more of a mother figure for the wilis than a dictator. The nature of Myrtha's maternity can be seen in Nuñez's stern, yet concerned portrayal of the wili Queen and the wilis' obedient and grateful response.

When Nuñez enters the stage as Myrtha, she appears rigid in the neck and austere in the arms, yet her eyes hold a softer glimmer as she looks out beyond the audience. It is as if she is seeing what the future holds for her wilis, just as a mother might wonder about the prospects of her daughters. Somehow, Myrtha's furrowed

brow shows concern, as if the responsibility of these girls weighs heavily on her. In a way, she is the equivalent of Giselle's mother, Berthe, in the afterlife. In the beginning of the ballet, Berthe is wary of the attention her daughter is receiving from Loys and tries to protect Giselle from his questionable intentions. While she would never think to kill anyone, she has Myrtha's same wariness for the pain men can inflict upon women.

Having died before their wedding day, each member of the wilis is haunted by betrayal or simply a lack of fulfillment (Balanchine 169). Such pain being brought on by unreliable suitors, the wilis seek to retaliate in the afterlife. In leading the wilis' revenge, Myrtha protects her "daughters" from the likes of men. However, her motherly instinct is not only evident in her promotion of the wilis' ambition. Myrtha actively lowers herself to the level of her followers, indicating that she has affection for them that is deeper than that of a ruler-subject relationship. This humbling act is seen when she calls the wilis onstage for the first time. She does not simply command them to appear, but instead leans forward in deep lunges beckoning her dancers to her. She physically lowers herself from her high standing position to request their presence. Another way this unpretentious character trait is expressed is the manner in which Myrtha welcomes new wilis to the afterlife. She calls upon each wili individually after their death, bringing herself to the unpleasant grave to liberate them from the earth (Balanchine 175). She does not need to visit the grave herself; she could easily send one of her many followers to do the "dirty work." Nevertheless, she chooses to attend to this important visit herself, revealing the value she places on her subjects. Finally, Myrtha physically reaches out to her wilis, showing her willingness to give. When Giselle runs away after her first dance as a wili, Myrtha goes after her with open arms. Not only is she tangibly expressing concern, her body language also indicates a desire to comfort and relieve pain. It is efforts like these that give color to Myrtha's character as a caregiver and undermine the idea that she is only out for her own schemes.

The maternal nature of Myrtha is reinforced by the way her followers interact with her. The wilis are certainly humbled and obedient as subjects would be to a queen; however, there is something more child-like and needy in the way they follow Myrtha. The wilis are products of their situation, simply looking for guidance. These young women have died and found themselves unable to rest in peace. Instead, they are trapped in a ghost-like state, not fully belonging to any known world. What consolation they have found in this limbo is Myrtha, a strong female figure who presents a way to have a sense of control in their otherwise helpless state. Myrtha seems to want to provide the wilis with this power to control the fate of men for their own sake rather than for her selfish purposes.

It is as if Myrtha has taken in orphaned girls and has given them a purpose, an outlet for their suffering. They are grateful to their leader taking them under her wing and showing them this means of coping with the afterlife. This gratitude can be seen in the corps de ballet's unassuming entrance and willingness to follow Myrtha's directions. With heads gently bowed as they enter, the wilis show humility and respect for their caretaker. They carefully approach Myrtha like loyal daughters seeking approval, without reluctance, acknowledging their need for guidance. This need is evident in their earnest imitation of Myrtha's dancing. As Myrtha leads the wilis in dance, slowly increasing the speed and effort involved in the movement, it is as if she were a governess taking her pupils through daily exercises to improve their skills. With

each strong sweep of the queen's port de bras, the corps responds with port de bras of their own to hone their dangerous dancing abilities. By providing the wilis with a means of enduring the afterlife, Myrtha has proven her dedication and ability to provide. The wilis imitate the object of their earned respect and admiration.

The way in which Myrtha cares and provides for the wilis is a clear indication that she is a multifaceted character: not wholly evil or wholly good. There is no doubt that Myrtha kills wayward men without a second thought. However, that does not denote that she is completely without compassion. In fact, she is the opposite when it comes to her dancers. Myrtha actively puts forth her energy to welcome, comfort, and guide the wilis in a way that is far from dictatorial. Being trapped in the same between-life state as her followers, Myrtha understands the wilis' plight. Though her actions may not bring the wilis closer to the eternal rest Giselle achieves, Myrtha is simply guiding her charges in the best way she knows, as any mother would do.

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Mu as the *Black Swan* Photo by: Jennifer Kramer

Elizabeth Mu is a first year dance major from Redding, CA. She plans to graduate from UC, Irvine in 2015 and, although it's hard to predict at this moment, she now wants to pursue a performance career and then attend graduate school to study psychology.

Who Am I, if I'm Not Dancing?

When college dancers are injured, they may struggle with identity problems while not being in top shape. What do they do? With the right advice, they become smart dancers by getting proper treatment and understanding what they need to heal.

by Christine Trebtoske

Dance is a competitive world; hundreds of dancers can audition for a single part in a company, show, or a university dance program. Having an off day in the studio or at an audition can mean the difference between a dancer getting the job or person next to them getting the position instead. Dancers may not want to admit to themselves that they are in pain and that they may be injured because sitting out and resting means missing out on dance opportunities. Instead, many dancers push themselves despite the pain and "muscle through" to continue working in their chosen profession. Dancers get injured, so they need to admit to themselves they are injured, and take the time to rest and recover.

According to dance injury researchers Mainwaring, Krasnow, and Kerr, "Dancers continue to dance with injury, pain, and discomfort, perhaps to avoid the 'disruption of self' that emanates from injury, and perhaps because of the embedded subculture in dance that embraces injury, pain, and tolerance."[1] When a dancer admits injury and seeks medical attention, rest is typically the diagnosis. I talked to three UCI dance majors and asked them about their experience of needing to rest to recover from injury. These dancers talk about the pressures associated with the subculture in dance that embraces dancing through the pain, along with other social and psychological factors.

Through my research I found that some psychological variables include personality, affect, and behavior. I also found that some of the social variables include social support, interaction, life stress, and the rehabilitation environment.[2] The duration of the injuries has been linked to stress and social support;[3] this is why it is important for peers and teachers to include injured dancers in technique class and upcoming performances in some manner. Also, I looked at help-seeking behaviors of injured dancers, which means an individual is finding the correct support and opportunities for recovery. Help-seeking behaviors of dancers have been expressed as an area that warrants further examination in the literature in relation to recovery time.[4]

Dancer #1 explained, "Being a part of the UCI dance scene was an important aspect of recovery for me. I did not want to lose sight of the big picture of having a career in the field of dance and found ways to progress forward. I actively watched technique class and stayed a part of the rehearsal process for an upcoming piece I was now unable to perform in. Even though I was not physically working on my technique as a movement artist, I was able to fine tune my skills of hearing music and was able to be creative by choreographing and giving feedback to other dancers performing."

This dancer explained that recovering from injury and returning to dance was very important to her. She sought medical advice for her injury, meaning she participated in help-seeking behaviors. The biggest effect this injury had on her was figuring out what she could still contribute to the field of dance and her career.

She explained that her life stress went down during this period. This was due

to her not packing her schedule as tightly as usual, so she could focus on healing. She was happy with her rehabilitation environment and had a lot of social support; finding professors, colleagues, friends, family, and her significant other to be very supportive. She believed that all this contributed to her recovery.

Dancer #2 explained that the biggest effect this injury had on her has been figuring out where she belongs in the UCI dance community as an injured dancer. She has a chronic injury that has bothered her on and off now for over a year. Originally, she focused on pain management so she could continue doing her beloved art form of dance. In the beginning, she had a hard time admitting the severity of the injury and seeking professional medical attention. In the interview process she stated, "Deep down I knew exactly what was going on. I did not want to believe that I had injured myself, seriously injured myself, because I did not want to seek medical attention and be told I would not be able to dance."

This fear of not being able to dance for a long period of time has been a constant theme I have heard from many college dance majors. Taking time off or limiting activity level at the time of injury is important to the recovery process but can cause a disruption of self. It is important to understand that a small injury can become a bigger problem if one does not allow the body to rest and recover. In dance, we do not have an off-season to rest or train like in college sports. College dancers are always getting ready for the next upcoming performance and many dancers use school breaks to perform outside of academia, audition and attend intensive programs.

Dancer #2 was able to rest her body on breaks from the academic year, but she had not allowed her body to completely heal. Recently, she found that her lingering injury was affecting other areas of her body and she decided she needed to seek medical advice. The doctor indeed told her she needed to take some time off from dancing so she could recover. Once she took time to rest, she found herself questioning who she was in the UCI dance program as an injured dancer. Initially, she felt she was missing out on the full experience her college dance program had to offer but soon she realized she could use this time to further develop her strengths in other areas within the department.

She found her support system to be very important to her process of healing. Aside from her family, friends, and faculty, psychological therapy has been an appropriate means of support for her. During her injury she experienced, fear of loss of identity, frustrations from not dancing, and feelings of isolations from her peers. She explained to me that she needed to pull away to assess her injury, but the pulling away left her feeling alone. Currently she has reintroduced herself into the UCI dance scene and has realized that her visible presence was essential to her recovery and dance career.

Dancer #3 saw her injury as a traumatic event. Initially when she hurt herself, she did not know the magnitude of the injury and was worried about how much this would affect her dance career. She was not sure if she would need surgery, and she was embarrassed and worried people might think she had bad technique. Her dance-related injury occurred while being partnered, so being able to trust dance partners again has been her biggest challenge.

This dancer was very driven in her recovery process. She constantly asked herself, "How can I take care of myself so I can dance again?" She explained to me that it was very important for her to stay involved as a dancer at UCI so she modified exercises in dance technique classes and integrated her physical rehabilitation

exercises into her coursework. Her social support system consisted primarily of her mom who flew down to help her recover. She stated, "I could not have done it without her." Injuries can be a very hard time for dancers emotionally and physically. Having a social support system is very important.

Throughout this period, Dancer #3 wanted to remain professional but it was a depressing time for her. She cried a lot and felt very angry. She discussed how at times she felt a lack of support and isolated from other dancers stating, "I felt like some of my peers did not know how to talk to me when I was injured." She explained in her interview that she blocks out that period of her life. She is very happy to be back dancing now that she has recovered from her injury. She stated, "Dance is not everything I am. It helps me express myself through my body. Dance is really important to me, and my life would not be the same for me if I could not dance again. Dance lets me express my identity."

All three of these dancers identified themselves primarily as a dancer. For each of them it was a struggle to figure out how to define themselves when injured. They all displayed help-seeking behaviors and found ways to stay connected or reconnect to UCI's dance program. I speculate this aided them in their recovery. Injuries need to be talked about and dancers need to feel that they can take time to rest if needed. The concept of embracing the injury, letting your body rest, and seeking help has become more acceptable in dance companies and university programs. For example: Birmingham Ballet has a wellness center that encourages their own professional dancers to report and treat injuries of all magnitudes. Also, Cirque du Soleil, Disney, and here at the University of California, Irvine, we have athletic trainers available for our dance population. Using the resources available, resting, and having a social support system will help the injured dancer recover. Dancers will continue to get injured, and it is important that they seek help for their injury and allow their body time to recover.

Acknowledgements:
I would like to thank the dancers who participated in my interview process and UCI faculty that made this possible.

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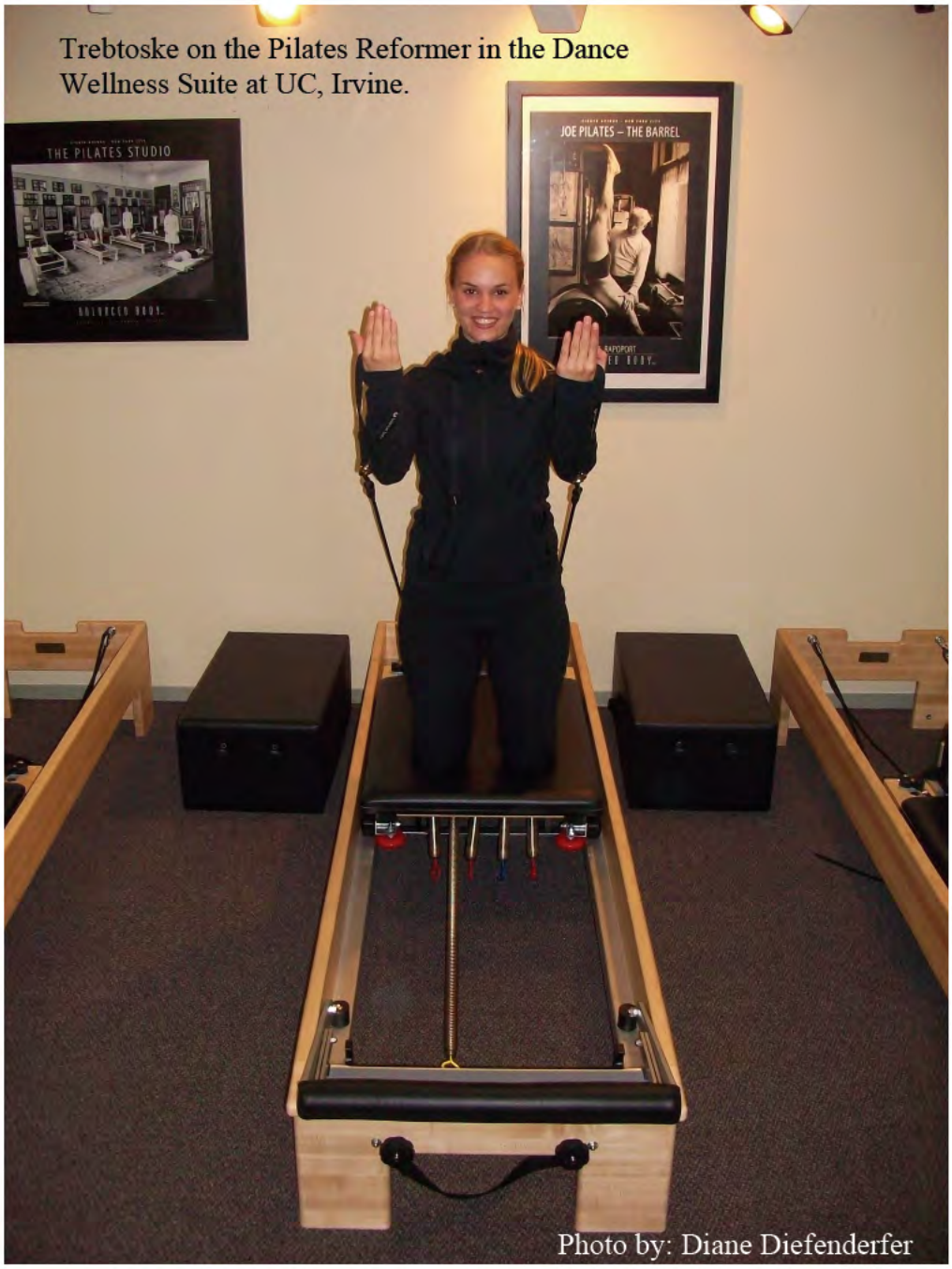

Trebtoske on the Pilates Reformer in the Dance Wellness Suite at UC, Irvine.

Class is like a Form of Religion

How faithful are you to attending regular technique classes? Here's how one professional dancer who transitioned to graduate school sees her relationship to class, whether it's a regular ritual, or one she can't participate in because of injury.

by Megan Flynn

As part of my application essay to the graduate program at the University of California, Irvine, I quoted the lyric, "I danced myself right out the womb" from the T Rex song, "Cosmic Dancer" and the film *Billy Elliot.* The line seemed to aptly describe my earliest childhood memories and a majority of the ones since. In the fantasy version of my current self, I am still that little girl putting on performances on the hearth of the fireplace, jeté-ing down the aisles of the grocery store, and, later, testing my balance on demi-pointe while waiting for the coffee to percolate. There is some truth in fantasy.

When I entered graduate school, I was surprised to be surrounded by a large number of strong, healthy, motivated young dancers on the brink of professional careers. I had forgotten how a young, eager dancer is fearless in the studio and capable of pushing themselves to the extreme with or without a proper warm-up. Which led me to that daunting question: When did I get old?

In a pre-professional training program, daily class is like a form of religion. The devout attend class for fear of losing out on precious training time before entering the real world. Every second of every class is preparation for what might come up in an audition or an opportunity to fine-tune your instrument before its debut. I, too, was completely dependent on my daily barre and feared the mantra, "One day off from dancing, and it will take two days to come back."

Somewhere between completing my undergraduate education, and the first four years of my professional career, my relationship to "class" changed. I found my self running between rehearsals in the West Village to seeing Pilates clients in Brooklyn, back to the Upper West Side of Manhattan for more rehearsals, and a couple of part-time nanny jobs, on an almost daily basis. Class was no longer a daily priority or a necessity. It was a luxury. When I could afford it, or when the company provided it, I was delighted to be back in class, as it was the one place that was for *me.*

As I was accustomed to taking class with dancers who were often older than me by anywhere from five to thirty-five years or more, I recognized a shift in my own consciousness about the benefits and reasons for class. Sure, there were young, fresh-faced newbies that descended on the city following graduations from conservatory programs in May and June. For the first few months, their maintenance of a strict dedication to the ritual was both intimidating and impressive. Yet, they were quickly absorbed into the landscape of professional-level classes offered across the city. I, like many, sought out a specific teacher and technique that fit my mood, my physical needs, or a location convenient to rehearsal for that particular day. Sometimes I chose a ballet class and other times, a contemporary release technique, Thai yoga massage class, Pilates, Limón, or Cunningham class. It was such a treat to take a class and work at my own pace, all while being challenged by the communal strengths of the experienced dancers in attendance.

So when I decided to return to school, I had the most difficult time transitioning back into a regular schedule of technique classes with specific attendance rules and expectations. No more leaving class before the grand allégro because there was a tacit understanding with a teacher that jumps were not on your personal agenda for the week. No more choosing a technique or teacher based on your mood for the day. How is it possible that I would be complaining about the opportunity to have regular, consistent training in my graduate program that was not dictated by my outside work commitments or ability to pay?

It took one quarter of school to get used to my new situation, one that most freelance dancers could only dream of. I finally became accustomed to the commitment of daily class, with a regular teacher, and a non-transient dance community of fellow students. I had taken for granted that technique classes in academia were consistent, without considering that *I* might not be. But unfortunately, even a regular class schedule can't prevent you from unforeseen injury.

Over winter break of my first year of graduate school, I returned to New York City to perform with my former company for their annual holiday production. During opening night, I tore my left calf muscle mid-performance. I landed from a complicated section of petite allegro when I felt the "pop" and recognized an eerie disconnect from what I was telling my body to do and what it was actually doing. In a state of shock, I swallowed a prescription-sized dose of anti-inflammatories, sprayed on a numbing solution, stuck on some pain patches to the site of the injury, and taped up my calf for extra support. I iced after each performance and repeated this masking strategy for the remainder of the six-show run. Once it felt better, I returned to class and my regular routine. From this denial of treatment, I set myself up for re-injury—most recently this past fall.

In the face of injury, the identity as a dancer is challenged to the core. If I can't dance, who am I? There are many dancers who have faced this question at some point during their pre-professional training and undergraduate education. The question becomes even more pertinent when a dancer is working in their chosen field and is juggling the demands of a portfolio career that depends on a healthy, functioning body and mind. For some reason, I had not expected the possibility of injury when I decided to pursue graduate-level education and was completely unprepared for it.

Due to re-injuring the same muscle, the damage to the calf was more severe and has taken a longer course of rehabilitation. It took four months before I was at a place where I could take a more active role in observing class in anticipation of re-integrating into the community of dance artists already in practice. At first, I was aware of my outsider position and my desire to disappear from view to the students I was observing. I felt conflicted about watching the students in the intimate setting of a class, and questioned if I could allow myself to be *part* of the class, rather than *apart* from the class.

Sitting and watching a dance class can be challenging for any dancer, especially when that dancer is sidelined due to injury or illness. As a younger dancer, I would not have had the patience to sit and watch an hour and fifty minute class because it would only serve to remind me of the opportunity I was "missing" by not being able to participate. Yet, as a graduate student, and as a dancer with the experience of a professional career prior to returning for my degree, I have a unique perspective on the technique class. I now study the way a dancer interprets the given exercises and

also the way the teacher relays and embeds their teaching philosophy into the material.

From the participant-observer perspective, I have learned to embody the exercises as I witness them. This has completely changed the way I watch a class. There is no judgment in how I should/ would/could be doing the exercise if I was healthy enough. There is no comparison between the dancers I observe and my perceived ability to execute the exercise in my ideal dancing body. Instead, there is a wonderful clarity of the teacher's goals, synthesized with my own comprehension of pedagogy, and the years of training within my body that allows me to fully participate in a dance technique class, even when I am not technically "dancing."

There are times that I will be observing a student working through a movement concept, researching how to fall or how far is too far, or discovering a new way to balance "accuracy" with their artistry. In these moments, I am no longer a mere observer, but a kind of participant in their experience. I have actually exclaimed, "Oh!" or physically jumped in my seat when I, too, experience their classroom discovery. It is exciting and satisfying to witness students grow and develop as artists. These moments occur when watching my fellow graduate students and professionals alike, but there is something very rewarding to see an undergraduate rise to a new level of expression. This is one of the reasons why I love teaching—to watch a student succeed at a moment they least expect it.

I no longer let my injury shame me or make me feel like an outsider in my own body or in the dance department as a whole. My fantasy self is already envisioning getting back into the routine, and I ache for the day my PT says I am OK to start doing my grand pliés, relevés and jumps again. By taking responsibility for my own healing process, and the associated time frame that I had no control over, I have discovered a completely new perspective on the dancer's practice that we call "class."

Originally from Connecticut, Flynn received a BFA in Dance from Newcomb College of Tulane University, and a Professional Diploma from the Laban Centre in London, England. She danced professionally for seven years with companies and as a freelance artist in New York City, Boston, and the UK. Flynn will complete her MFA at UC Irvine in Spring 2012, with a thesis titled "Choreographing Memories in the Body" and afterward hopes to teach in higher education.

Flynn Photo by:
Adam Petrasek

WHAT NOT TO DO….as a professional dancer

So you're going out to join the professional world as a dancer after graduation? Here's advice from an experienced dancer and choreographer that will help you succeed.

by John Pennington

OK, so you're exiting the university system after years of training and lots of being told WHAT TO DO. You are excited and optimistic about your future in dance and its related fields, but where is that elusive life manual to reference when you need help? Are you fully prepared to face the real world outside the womb of academia?

Now, take a big breath and exhale.

The truth is—no school, training program, or faculty can give you all the tools for survival and success. Much of that knowledge is gleaned from experience, practice, and good mentors. You will make mistakes, have bad experiences, feel like a failure—but you will also have triumphs, be rewarded for your work, and experience joy in your profession.

As I was preparing to write this article, I thought it might be helpful to shed some light on things NOT TO DO as you build your career and reputation in the dance field. All of my NOT TO DO suggestions are based on my personal experience as a dancer, choreographer, educator, artistic director, and witness to actions of dancers I've worked with, hired, and fired. Some things I'm guilty of and learned "what not to do" the hard way.

So, here are my suggestions of
WHAT NOT TO DO:

DO NOT make "having fun" your goal in a class, rehearsal, or audition. Going out with your friends is having fun, going to Disneyland is having fun, and going to the movies is having fun. Dance is hard work and requires much of you in the professional and even amateur arenas. A serious attitude and respect for the art form, including the people practicing that art form, will yield a result that lays a solid foundation for years to come. Go to dance class to learn something, to grow, to be challenged, to improve. Learning is uncomfortable, frustration is a part of training, and difficult challenges should be welcomed. If you can live with the idea that dance is always bigger than you, "bored" will never be a word that describes your mental state, and you'll enjoy a lifetime of growing, changing, and claiming your potential. Your passion can provide joy and laughter, but as a reminder, fun is a by-product of earnest investment in the hard work of dance.

DO NOT commit to a project, choreographer, or group and back out unless there are extenuating circumstances—and

Pennington in his "Cuirass" Photo by: Chris Campolongo

even then, help find a replacement. I've seen it happen too many times: a dancer will be asked to work (whether paid or not), then quit because a "better" offer comes her/his way; or a dancer will not like the work or the people with whom they are working and back out ungraciously. I can't be more emphatic that your reputation is at stake when you quit without just cause. Of course, examples such as abuse by a director/ choreographer and family tragedy are reasons to withdraw from a project, but in any instance be clear why you make the decision.

DO NOT say no to an understudy role. In fact, look for opportunities to cover a role. You will learn something along the way, you will get to know how different choreographers and dancers work, you will open the possibilities for a performance, and you will increase your understanding of your personal aesthetics. It will also be in your favor to have that choreographer as a reference when applying for other jobs.

DO NOT LIE anywhere, anyway, anyhow. Our present culture seems to elevate and make fashionable the conniving, mendacious, and unethical characters we view on television. While those characters certainly make great fodder for dramas/ soaps and reality TV series, any lie you create will eventually catch up with you whether you know it or not. I've been in the uncomfortable position of receiving a call from a prospective employer asking about one of my former students or colleagues, and I must tell the truth about what I know because I would expect the same of my inquiry to them. Sadly, I've reported about poor attitude, bad behavior, and lying. Happily, I've also been able to endorse people wholeheartedly, bringing me to my next point.

DO NOT think you operate in stealth. While the world seems to be a big place, the dance world is small. If you are prone to fits that label you as a "Diva," or you underperform because a job in a small city doesn't seem to be as important as a prime hire in a metropolis, or you're divisive by nature, be aware that reports of your behavior and lack of professionalism will become shared information. For example: I recently worked with an artist who behaved in a most unprofessional manner and word got back to the representing agency. As a result, the dancer is no longer employed by the agency, and sadly, forfeited a potential job recommendation. Please be prudent in all your professional behavior—whether you think someone is watching or not.

DO NOT waste people's time. Time is Money. You need to be available, polite, ready, skilled, and open at all times. From small non-profit dance companies to large commercial productions, money is budgeted for rehearsals and your job is to assist the

vision of the project. Even if you are not being paid or receiving a stipend, work as if you are at the top of the pay scale. This does not mean you are naïve and allow people to take advantage of your generosity; instead you strive to become a consistent, reliable, and hirable artist.

And finally, let me offer a thought on WHAT TO DO. Learn to speak highly and intelligently about your art form. Elevate it. Engage the renewal, change, and excitement of your generation and let it occupy your art. Find a purpose in your life and art that sustains, nourishes, and propels you and those around you.

To close, I'd like to share an acronym that has been helpful to me when making art and living life. These are questions you might ask. You'll know what TO DO or NOT TO DO, when you T.H.I.N.K.

Is it **T**ruthful?
Is it **H**onest?
Is it **I**nsightful?
Is it **N**ecessary?
Is it **K**ind?

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www.penningtondancegroup.org or www.arcpasadena.org

Pennington as Ted Shawn in "Ich Ruf Zu Dir." Photo by: Rose Eichenbaum

Why Every Dance Classroom Needs a Musician

With the live musician in the dance studio becoming an endangered species, here's the story of how one of them found what music YOU need to dance to, and learned a lot more in the process.

by Norman Beede

Beede at home with sister Tina

I'd like to discuss time and space with you. Not in an Einstein, Stephen Hawking or scientific way. It is the time and space shared by myself and any dancer or choreographer I'm working with at the moment. It is defined for me as creative, artful, free flowing and spiritual. I am writing from the point of view of pianist, composer and collaborator, creating and performing for and teaching music to brave, artistic, dancing souls for more than forty of my sixty-one years.

The first dance class I played music for was in 1971 at Cal Arts in Valencia, CA. I needed to support myself while going to school. My girlfriend in Whittier had a friend whose family ran a music store in Newhall, near Cal-Arts. Suddenly six students appeared. That was a good start. The first week of school I saw a sign on the music department door "pianists needed for dance classes, inquire in music office." I inquired. I improvised for over an hour at that first modern class. Not only did I barely have an inkling of what modern dance might be, I had trouble believing a job existed where I would be paid $5.30 an hour to improvise what I was inspired to play. The only endeavor more sacred to me than improvising was practicing Prokofiev, Chopin, Ravel or Debussy. Today, five dollars is barely enough to buy a small latte with pastry, but in 1971 the pay from one class would fill my Valiant station wagon's gas tank, buy a meal at the Saugus café, and leave enough scratch to buy a pack of cigarettes. Today, to replace that income, I need to make $50 an hour. No, I'm sorry—in Los Angeles, $60 or more would be closer to the truth.

A week after passing the audition for modern I played for my first ballet class. Soon after class I was called into the office of the dance department's faculty musician to be let go on the recommendation of the dean, Bella Lewitsky. Bella had serendipitously dropped in to take class and couldn't help but hear the struggling going on from the keyboard. I had arrived with no idea how to play a four count introduction or what to play, other than it had to be classical and square, four or eight bar phrases. The instructor, a teaching assistant, couldn't give me any information about tempo or time signature other than "that's not working." Even when I could figure out what to play, it took time to find it in my classical books, compounding the incompetence quotient.

My technique wasn't the problem. I had played Prokofiev's Fifth Piano Sonata in a concert series in San Francisco earlier that year. Sight reading was not the problem either—it was not knowing what to play and why. At one point Bella came over to the piano, suggesting I try a waltz in the "Strauss tradition." Being a late 20th century improviser I thought she meant Richard

Strauss. So, close to jumping ship but not yet ready to give up, I played an improvisation that neither Richard or Johann would have claimed in their worst nightmares. Later, begging my supervisor to give me a week or two to research and prepare what to play for ballet class, she cautiously gave me a week. I got better. The next year I was asked to play for former ballerina Mia Slavenska's advanced classes when her favorite pianist left. I played for Mia at Cal-Arts and at UCLA for the next year and a half until I was hired as full time accompanist at Cal State Los Angeles where I played for modern and ballet classes, composed, performed, and recorded music for class and choreography.

Almost twenty years later, just before all live music for class at Cal-State L.A. was discontinued due to budget cuts, never yet to return, I passed visiting artist Bella Lewitsky in the hall way at the dance department. A modern dance legend now, Bella had dropped in to watch the students, including those from the High School for the Arts. She had just seen me playing for my "many thousandth" modern dance class and remarked to me, "You have made a real contribution to dance here." It was a long, fascinating road from 1971 to 1991. I had learned a great deal from dance and dancers about music, myself and life.

Back to the sacred space dancers and musicians share. It is at the center of a dialogue that manifests in memorable, sometimes great work by both musician and dancer. As important as whales, our forests and wetlands, the elephant and the tiger, this space needs to be protected and preserved. Sacred space, where the mover and sound creator collide to create something more beautiful than the sum of the parts that neither could have foreseen alone, unless of course they were Alwin Nikolais. There is an unfortunate disconnect from live music in the dance class that has been increasing in tempo for ten to twenty years. Starting slowly in the late 1980s and early 90s, staff cuts in universities and arts schools are now on the rise and continuing. Technological refinement in the form of iPads, iPods and other forms of good and very portable sound inspire bean counters to look at live music in the dance class and see the perfect excuse to cut the budgets a little more. It is literally a *little* more, no longer a large sum in today's dollars. The salary of one, or maybe one-and-a-half tenured professors would pay for a stable of high quality, happy pianists and percussionists and leave enough left over to keep the pianos in tune all year long in a large university dance department. Simply said, a lot of bang for the buck. Without musicians in the dance classroom, the richness of collaboration disappears, or at very least is once removed, becoming virtual, as it were. Music rules and becomes product, no longer collaboration. Interchange lessens. Knowledge and creativity suffers.

Whether from the need for inspiration, structure, permission or interaction composers have created some of their most beloved music alongside the dance muse. Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Copland, Prokofiev, Bach, Strauss and Chopin, the list goes on. Bach, you ask? Minuets, Gavottes, Gigues and more. Not a day goes by that I don't play something from a Bach English or French Suite for ballet class. Peasant dance and the dances of royalty all helped mold the structure of music in the opulent Baroque period, the codifying era of western classical music tradition. In the early twentieth century the influence of dance appears again. Stravinsky is regarded as the most important composer of the 20th century. His biggest contribution to the evolution of music was made by his ballet scores. For music and dance, the premier of the *Rite of Spring* in Paris on May 29, 1913 was perhaps the single most important event of

the twentieth century, a game changer. Cage and Cunningham bookend the late 20th century with even more revolutions related to dance.

There are potholes on the highway of live music in the dance class. As in any human endeavor personalities can clash. A musician might have trouble once in a while keeping a steady beat. A composer/ improvisor isn't able to handle a complex time signature yet or a series of different time signatures. Maybe a ballet pianist rushes when she is unsure of a piece, not enough energy coming from the piano or maybe a drummer resorts to ear crushing volume. These are the moments of learning for musician and dancer. Communication is paramount. Communication from both dancer and musician. It truly is sacred space when we find a good fit. When it's challenging it is grist for the learning mill. I believe the sublime moments outweigh the angst and are virtually impossible in the virtual world of CD, iPod or iPad.

When I listen to other musicians play in class and often when I play with a colleague, usually a percussionist, I notice that the "inspire-ameter" can go off the chart for dancers as well as musicians. Music is ready made and customized for the moment. Dancer and musician respond to each other. A seasoned, well-trained classical pianist can change tempos, even change pieces midstream and sometimes decide on better selections for the ballet teacher. A composer can create music that fits exactly, complements the movement or even inspires the evolution of a specific movement in modern class. In tap class, the tapper is percussionist, another musician for a pianist, guitarist or sax player to jam with. Flexibility is the key. Teachers often change their minds or adjust to the class energy in the middle of a phrase or movement. A prepared list of tunes on an iPod isn't going to fit that bill. Inspiration gleaned from the moment leads to the creative self or selves we aspire to be.

Musicians for Dance have issues. We love what we do and are passionate about our instrument or instruments and passionate about music. While trying in vain to save live music for dance classes at Cal State LA twenty years ago my colleague and I calculated that the approximate energy spent playing for an hour and a half in one dance class was equal to or more than it would be performing two Mozart piano concertos or one romantic era piano concerto. We love to play, but our pay is often low. We drive long distances to work for a relatively short time. At universities and downtown studios we pay for parking. Pianos are not tuned often enough, some never. I won't play for studios that don't tune or care about their pianos, a luxury of age and experience.

I've been privileged to work as accompanist and collaborator with many creative artists who were and are comfortable with and intelligently conversant in both the worlds of dance and of music. Carmelita Maracci, Gloria Newman and Donald McKayle come to mind as the most influential for me. They taught me incalculable truths. Carmelita for classical ballet accompaniment, Donald for modern composition and jazz improvisation, Gloria Newman for composition and learning to trust my instincts. Playing for these great artists inspired ideas for my music compositions, allowing me to work out ideas in class. Gloria loved uneven and complex time signatures, and for her it wasn't enough for me to continually play accents on the one and the four of a seven, or on the one and three of a five. She loved dance that changed time signature often. Gloria shared with me her recipe for harmonic rhythm and counterpoint that went further than changing time signatures. She would ask for melodic phrases that could overlap the uneven accents of the changing time signatures

below, sometimes coinciding with down-beats, often not. So, not only were the accents of these changing time signatures not your daddy's waltz or your mommy's fox trot, but the melodic patterns above them would take their own course of action independent of the rhythmic world below. This was a revelation for me at age twenty-five. Like Baroque composers, I was given from the dance, useable form for my music.

I learned different skills a few years earlier, playing ballet classes for Carmelita Maracci in her upstairs studio near the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. Her requests for certain pieces of music stretched my concepts of what to play for ballet class and ultimately how I looked at dance for inspiration. She had been a pianist as well as dancer. "I would like to hear how the 2nd movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 22 would sound with this choreography," she would say. Sometimes it would be, "I had Brahms in mind when creating this. Do you have any Brahms with you today?" Once decided upon, she would adjust the choreography to fit the music. I learned from my first class with Carmelita to bring Beethoven (both books of the Sonatas), Bach, Brahms, Schubert and Chopin to all subsequent classes. Her approach was nerve-wracking but did wonders for my sight reading skills and increased my ability to fill in the harmony when the bar line flew by too fast to play as written with absolute certainty.

Playing for Donald McKayle, I learned form, style and nuance. Creating an arc, a gestalt. Instead of Beethoven, Chopin, or Brahms, I brought my Real Book, playing Miles, Monk, Shorter, Ellington and of course, lots of fives and sevens and combinations of these, plus much extemporaneous Beede, always striving to create the illusion of a finished piece. McKayle's classes were my well, my workshop of ideas for scores I composed for students, UC Irvine faculty and other choreographers.

It is with great fondness that I think of those early days as well as the many years of living, thriving and reveling in that sacred space I have been dancing around, today with words. Though I see a long road ahead, at sixty-one I am closer to playing for my last dance class than to my first. I continue to practice the art of accompaniment, improvisation and composition in the class, my studio and on stage. Thank you dancers—I am grateful for my time with you, and I'm looking forward to many more hours of rich creation. I sincerely hope that the life's journey I have been privileged to experience will remain possible and open to young musicians who wish to partake. I'm keeping my fingers crossed. Keep the faith.

Norman Beede is Senior musician in the Dance Department of the University of California, Irvine. He is adjunct professor at California State University, Fullerton, and UCI Summer Session, where he teaches music for dancers. Well-known in the improvisation community of Southern California, he participates in concerts and teaches improvisation privately and in master classes. His credits include ambient music on Smithsonian Folkways, Ghost Opera on Cold Mountain Music and modern dance tracks and CD's at asimplesound.com and asgardprod.com. For more information: normanbeede.com and shortcutstomusicwisdom.com

Plan B—Surprisingly Better than Plan A!

Coming back to school turned out to be the key to a fuller professional life for one former dance major and current musical theatre choreographer. How does she use her university education in the professional dance world now? Let her count the ways….

by Heather Castillo


Photo by: Rolland Petrello

As an undergraduate dance major at UC Irvine, I distinctly remember discussing the importance of having a "plan B" in my Critical Issues in Dance class. As a non-traditionally aged student with a ten-year career as a commercial dancer behind me, sitting in that class room *was* my "plan B." The irony was not lost on me. My fellow dance majors were aspiring professional dancers barely out of their teens, while I was scarcely out of my twenties, earning an undergraduate degree that prepared me for a career I had already had. What was inexplicable to family (non-dancers) and friends (dance aficionados) was that I knew I was doing the right thing for me. I am proud to share with you that without returning to school to earn my BFA in choreography and my MFA in dance, I would not have the tools to take advantage of opportunities offered me since graduating.

The original reason I returned to school was to become a dance professor in the college system. Aside from attaining that goal, to my surprise, I have the unexpected career of musical theatre choreographer. I have choreographed about a dozen professional musical theatre shows, with several more on the horizon. I am humbled to say that I have received critical acclaim for this work: Ovation Award nominations, West Coast Premieres, *LA Times* critic's pick of the week, Backstage critics pick, and the highlight—winning the 2010 Broadwayworld.com Southern California Best Choreography award (sharing a nomination with my hero and subject of a paper or two at UCI, Matthew Bourne).

I am here to tell you Plan B is surprisingly better than Plan A, and none of it would have been possible without my dance degree.

Not all dance majors loved the courses I was crazy about and found most useful in my post-university career. Music for Dancers, Labanotation, and Dance History have been integral to my process and success as a musical theatre choreographer. I also took courses in Drama, such as Directing, Lighting, Music Proficiency, and Production. Music Literacy has been essential to my new career. Having the ability to work from the musical score with a rehearsal accompanist and to converse with

music directors is invaluable. It is a skill I rely on every moment.

A musical score is too dense to write my choreography notes on, so I created something partially based on my knowledge of music notation and appreciation for Labanotation: the count sheet. Using an excel type program, I translate the music score with lyrics into count sheets. They have more space for writing my choreography notes, for which I use my own shorthand version of Labanotation. Count sheets allow me to communicate with my music director in terms of bar number and tempo quickly while communicating in counts and lyrics to my dancers. Often, several stage managers, directors, designers, and actors have asked for copies, finding them very useful to keep their own notes on. This creation would not have been possible without the knowledge I gained from the music and Labanotation courses I took as a student.

Dance History was and is one of my favorite components of earning my degree. As a student, Delsartism, while interesting, did not appear pertinent, especially to any aspect of my then-unknown future career. All that changed once I was commissioned to choreograph the West Coast premiere of *Loving Repeating, A Musical of Gertrude Stein*. For those of you unfamiliar with who she is, she was a famous expatriate writer and lesbian poetess living in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century. Writing repetitiously without repeating was what she was known for. The entire text of the show was taken from her writings. Songs with titles like "As A Wife has A Cow", "Do As They Do So," and "A Cow Coming" were mystifying enough that other choreographers in the Los Angeles area had turned the opportunity down. Once I heard the score I leapt at the chance to interpret this unusual project. The musical was not "a dance show," like *42nd Street* or *West Side Story*; however, movement was integral to the audience's comprehension of this textually confusing non-linear show. During my meeting with the producer I came armed with cursory knowledge of Delsarte and Isadora Duncan, important figures of Stein's era that I could use as inspiration for movement. That knowledge was key to my success as a choreographer and collaborator. *Loving Repeating* has not been the only show where dance history has been intrinsic to success. *Cinderella, The Sound of Music, Annie, She Loves Me*, and many others have warranted research of a historical nature.

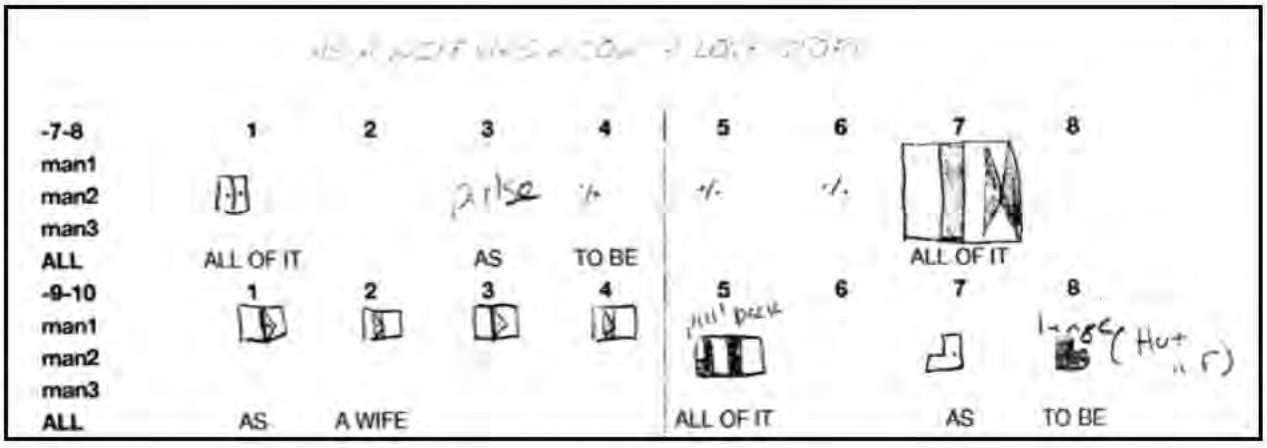
Courses in choreography, improvisation, and different techniques have all contributed to my success. Challenges that frustrated me greatly as a student have proven crucial to me as a creator of movement. Assignments where I had to create a dance vocabulary from artwork became a tactic I then used in creating the vernacular for *Seussical*, based on Dr. Seuss's iconic cartoons. Modern dance gave me knowledge of gravity, space, and freedom to expand on conventional notions of what musical theatre vocabulary is. Laban Movement Analysis allowed me to use language that was not intimidating to actor/movers therefore helping me to effectively communicate to achieve the best possible performance.

My decision to pursue a degree in dance was not arrived at easily, especially in light of my age at the time. To many, I had already achieved what a dance major would hope to accomplish after graduation. Where the average dance major was looking to work on style, strength, and technique, I found refuge in history, theory, and creation of dance vocabulary. Technique was still very important, and I relished adding to my existing training base, but I enjoyed all facets.

Please let me advise you: *Your degree in dance holds immense worth*

beyond the initially perceived outcome in earning one. I am continually surprised how often I return to research and unconventional theories for musical theatre that I would have never been exposed to if it were not for my degree in dance. I did not return to school to learn the skills to be a choreographer. I returned to school so I could teach dance at the college level. I had no idea the academic aspect would hold such allure and also give me the keys to the career I never knew I always wanted, that of a musical theatre choreographer.

Heather Castillo is an award-winning choreographer in the Los Angeles area and teaches at CSU Channel Islands. She has a BFA in choreography and MFA in dance from UC Irvine.



A page from what Castillo calls "the count sheet," this one for the song "As a Wife Has a Cow" from *Loving Repeating, A Musical of Gertrude Stein*

Taking Space: An Architectural Digest of a Dancer

Here's how a dance degree can lead to a journalism and marketing career—all without giving up your dance sensibilities.

by Haley Greenwald-Gonella

Photo by: Ariane Moshayedi

First off, I am a dancer. I have just not made it to take class in awhile. Like a majority of today's dance majors, I started dancing as a child. At the tender age of three-and-a-half, my mom took me to my first ballet class. It was love at first plié.

Fast forward 13 years, I was walking through my high school, preparing for upcoming college tours and I resigned myself to the truth: I had to major in dance. As a five-year-old, I wanted to be a veterinarian, a lawyer, or eventually, a Supreme Court Justice—I believed even then that the odds were stacked against me becoming a professional ballerina, a career I thought I needed to start at 16 and would have me retire at 22 (although dancers these days have proven these ideas to be largely false). I decided to take a risk—even though I chose not to pursue the conservatory route, I knew dance had to be in my life. My parents did, too. My mom has always said that she could see my soul when I danced, and my dad encouraged me to keep writing, as a backup plan, as I had excelled in my high school English classes. I entered college at the University of California, Irvine as an English major and added the dance major as soon as I could.

I found a semblance of balance, as much balance as any college student can—my backpack on any given day contained three to five books for my English classes, notebooks, a plethora of pens, ballet shoes, tights, extra socks, and of course, Tiger Balm. What I loved most, though, was creating my dance library—books on dance history, criticism, and theory. This was sparked by the university's curriculum for dance majors. I had never been given the tools to truly explore the lineage of what I was doing and look at it with a critical eye from a variety of angles. Dance history changed the way I thought about my craft and it opened doors for me. My dance criticism class furthered my discovery and started debates that I knew I wanted to dive into deeper. I sought out independent study classes with Dr. Jennifer Fisher and wrote papers about Merce Cunningham and learned how to articulate what I was seeing on stage.

After graduating from UCI, I took some time off and started thinking about and preparing for graduate school. I always knew that I was going to go to graduate school—this was something that had been ingrained into me by my parents, but for what and where was not always clear. I finally decided that I was going to go to

journalism school because I wanted to become a dance critic, since I had fallen in love with dance criticism in college. In hindsight, I entered journalism at a crucial time—newspapers were closing and methods of content creation and distribution were drastically changing at a break-neck pace.

My college mentor Dr. Fisher suggested that I look into the new Specialized Journalism (The Arts) program at USC. I did and I knew instantly that this was where I needed to be. Located deep in the heart of Los Angeles, USC was perfectly close to a variety of amazing museums, galleries, and had a reputation that preceded it.

The day I received my acceptance into the program was the day that I knew I was started on a career fast track. I wanted a Master's program that was going to be theoretical and practical. From the first conversation with my advisor Professor Sasha Anawalt, who wrote *The Joffrey Ballet: Robert Joffrey and the Making of an American Dance Company*, I was excited to start classes and write my thesis.

A short summer course about social media jumpstarted the program, led by Professor Robert Hernandez and Professor Andrew Lih. It changed my life. This course dissected digital space, much the way that a dance theory class critically examines the way space is used on stage. If I knew then what I know now, I would have peppered my professors with even more questions, because I ended up the Social Media Accounts & Project Manager at Lush Life Productions, a boutique media company specializing in PR, brand strategy, marketing, events, and social media for wines and spirits brands in New York City. I realize now that first course at USC set the stage for what was to become my new passion—figuring out the next trends in social media and seeing how they could be used to benefit the arts.

I used my master's thesis to discover whether there was a place for the kind of work I wanted to do—to inspire dance advocacy through dance journalism and change the way people in all areas think about dance, especially public education. I was able to collaborate with amazing professors during the process, such as Professor Jennifer Floto, who I consider to be my PR mentor. I was able to audit classes in the Marshall School of Business with Professor Adlai Wertman, who I think prepared me for the practical side of working in any business more than I could have ever guessed.

After graduating at USC, I moved to New York City and just after arriving, got an email from a grad school friend. It contained a tweet from Flavorpill seeking social media interns—Flavorpill was one of the arts projects my cohort had studied as part of the NEA Summit hosted by the Annenberg School at USC during the Fall Semester. I applied and starting working as an intern and, within three months, I became the Sales & Marketing Manager.

The Specialized Journalism Master's program ignited an entrepreneurial spirit that had been first seeded by the initial ballet class my mom took me to. Dancers are creators. We are charged with looking at spaces and bodies and thinking in ways that challenge us to work outside the box and allow others to see what only we could imagine.

Being able to stand out and think in different ways has helped me to survive and embrace the New York hustle thus far. I constantly think back to my thesis work—the process, what I chose to write about, and with whom I worked—and how all of it profoundly influenced me. I never would have decided to go to journalism school had it not been for my dance coursework.

The biggest part of my long-term career plans is a quest to revamp the marketing for Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts—home to New York City Ballet, New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, and Lincoln Center Theater. I believe that traditional and classical forms of art need to be marketed to a younger audience—an audience that also needs to be trained how to appreciate these higher forms of expression. In the words of the late choreographer Pina Bausch: "Dance, dance—otherwise we are lost." Dance will always be part of my life, whether it is annually buying tickets to see *The Nutcracker*, taking a class here and there, reading a dance review or writing a blogpost, or just using my critical eye, which was honed through dance—I refuse to be lost.

Today, I still occupy staged spaces and design movement to elicit a desired emotional response. For me, now, most of this is done behind the scenes and there is no program attaching my name to the choreography, but there are lists of archived emails and my e-signature lays claim to my being the project manager and connects me to wireframes depicting various workflows—like labanotation for the social media strategist.

Haley Greenwald-Gonella is a social media theorist and brand strategist who grew up in Northern California. She has her M.A. in Specialized Journalism from the University of Southern California and wrote her thesis on the ways in which content creation and distribution, specifically with regard to arts journalism, are changing because of social media, branding, and PR. She also has degrees in Dance and English from the University of California, Irvine. Currently, she is the Social Media Accounts & Project Manager for Lush Life Productions (a boutique media company specializing in PR, brand strategy, marketing, events, and social media for wines and spirits brands) in New York City. Haley was previously the Sales & Marketing Manager for Flavorpill, an online arts & culture website and daily email.

Complacency, Hype, or Invigorating Substance?

Where is contemporary ballet headed in this age of new ballet "brands" and commercial mandates? Will you, as a dancer, have a "voice" in the creative process? LINES company member Whitmore assess the scene and the dancer's role in it.

by Keelan Whitmore


Photo by: Quinn B. Wharton

When I view a work of art, visual or live performance, I want to have experienced something lasting. As a dancer, I see my art as the expression of ideas through heightened consciousness, texture, fearless risk-taking, and vulnerability. On either side of the proscenium, I find myself wondering if dancers and audiences are being artistically challenged—pushed beyond simple viewing to a deeper level of experiencing dance. I'm always interested to find out what dance companies are doing to help nurture the creative process. Are dancers given enough room to contribute to the creative process? Are companies commissioning choreographers based on hype or invigorating substance? How important is collaborative exploration in the creative process? In this article I rely on my experiences as both a dancer and viewer to discuss artistic development as understood by today's vanguard contemporary choreographers and dancers.

As a dancer, I've noticed the same choreographers repeatedly commissioned by major ballet companies. Is this because they have a name and are able to create ballets that garner wide appeal? These audience-friendly ballets have become somewhat of a template to get butts in seats. They are in such high demand that choreographers have their ballets conceptualized and choreographed before they even step foot into the studio. For dancers, this situation is more than a bit disheartening. We are also creators and want more than anything to be an integral part of the creative process. We want to feel some sense of ownership, some part of our being in the final product.

Since coming to work with Alonzo King LINES Ballet, my perspective of dance has changed dramatically. Before joining the company in 2006, I danced for five seasons with Kansas City Ballet, a regional company that gave me the opportunity to dance a fantastic repertory and also co-found my own company, then named Quixotic Performance Fusion, with a local graphic designer. Though I could have remained in this comfortable position, I found myself seeking more from dance. When former LINES dancer Summer Lee Rhatigan came to Kansas City to stage King's *Handel Trio*, I experienced a rehearsal process that was completely different from what I knew. What she presented was *more* than ballet, I thought. It was a deep exploration of ideas of what she and King called "the science" of ballet, intertwined with a deeply personal investigation of the understanding and sensation of movement. It was what I wanted to do. It was how I wanted to be pushed. It was how I wanted to express my artistic voice.

Needless to say, the waters were troubled for me once I finally got to work with King during his annual weeklong workshop. I could no longer approach my dancing as I had in the past. So I decided to take a leap of faith and not stay at Kansas City Ballet. In San Francisco I found a radically different experience at LINES. I was now being asked to present my voice, and yet I found myself speechless. I saw myself hiding behind my training, my ego, and preconceived ideas of ballet. Only now, six seasons later, I feel like I've learned how to let go and trust every aspect of the creative process. And I'm still learning that the understanding of truth in movement, personal exploration, humility, and persistence are what help maintain a strong foundation. These elements enable me to present my voice. Our artistic voice is the element that illuminates our individuality.

Many can relate to the fact that certain constructions in ballet training often strip us of our intuition, leaving us voiceless in terms of creativity and imagination. To rediscover who we truly are as artists we must go through a process of relearning what dance truly is in order to find clarity in our artistic endeavors. One of today's most sought-after ballet choreographers, Wayne McGregor, is exploring a way to approach the relearning process. For him, working with dancers who possess an innate sense of individuality is a large aspect of inspiration in the creative process. He states in an online interview with Ballet Magazine in December of 2002:

"I believe that the more freedom an individual has to explore their own creativity in terms of the direction their life choices take them in are fundamental in the shaping of good dancers and artistic directors. The more diverse the experiences the more dynamic the vision, intelligence, sensibility, imagination those individuals have. It is here that vitality and individuality lives – diversity makes for excellent motivators and inspirers."

This statement reminds of a YouTube clip of a Paris Opera Ballet rehearsal in which the rehearsal director stated that Suzanne Farrell's technical faults became defining qualities for others. This affirms that the nurturing of a dancer's uniqueness is equally important as the lessons in the "science" of the vocabulary they learned in formative years of training. Farrell was known for having "faulty" technique as a dancer, yet she was Balanchine's most celebrated muse. What I gathered from working with Farrell at the Kennedy Center in 2007 was that she brought her personality, determination, musicality, and devotion to rehearsals. Everything else fell into place beautifully in the creative process.

Another dancer who got to be part of the creative process for many premieres is San Francisco Ballet's James Sofranko. He explained to me: "I've been fortunate to be a part of many creations of ballets in my time at SFB, and that to me is fulfilling. I take pride in knowing that I can give a choreographer a quality performance of his/her work, and that they are confident in having me be the vehicle through which their vision is expressed. Every premiere is an endeavor that has made me who I am today as an artist and a person. I think choreographers need chances to create work on quality dancers and companies, to keep the art form alive and vital. I enjoy knowing that I've been at the forefront of the evolution of my art in the premieres I've been involved with."

Unfortunately, this is not the case with every creative process. All too often there is very little room, if any at all, for the dancer to engage in in-depth personal exploration. To cut off the intuitive aspect of an artist's make up is to defeat the purpose of creating art. This can be difficult to avoid

when working with a repertory company. For certain companies with large budgets and long seasons, quantity over quality is the story, as some dancers become more of a "cog in the wheel" in an effort to produce several programs during a season. When asked about the experience of learning a large repertoire, Quinn Wharton of San Francisco Ballet said, "As far as the way I learn, I think you just get very good at picking up choreography quickly. You find out what you need to get by in the piece and get that much. You never learn enough to really develop the piece unless it's a new work that is getting a lot of time. We operate more in volume here than in very specific finesse."

I remember another colleague, Lateef Williams of Ballet du Rhin, feeling the same way as he exclaimed, "You never really get to taste what the ballet really is, because the time you spend with each ballet is so short-lived." Learning choreography by video also robs the artist of subtleties and nuances of the ideas of movement. In fact, some companies have even set some of the oldest ballets like *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, and *La Fille Mal Gardée* by using videos. What next—rehearsals via Skype? Where are we headed if we can't even stage the classics without asking the dancers to watch a video? Again, I think back to working with Farrell on Balanchine's *Scotch Symphony* and *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue,* I was amazed that she knew EVERYONE'S choreography and did not rely on any notes.

Maybe I'm old fashioned, but there is something beautiful about the rehearsal process where dancers feel they are given something that they can then pass on to the next generation. In these rehearsals you hear things like: "Mr. B was thinking this when he choreographed this." Or, "Nacho was very particular about that." And even, "Oh, this part here, you want to think of the cause and effect of the movement." I can recall working with Bart Cook on two memorable occasions when he staged Balanchine's *Stravinsky Violin Concerto* and Jerome Robbins' *Afternoon of a Faun* in Kansas City. The information he gave me not only gave insight as to the intentions of the choreographers, but also tools I could use to apply to my artistic endeavors. These are important elements that not only maintain the integrity and the ideals of the dances over a length of time, but also enrich and expand a dancer's range.

We look to the dance-makers of the present generation as guideposts directing the future of the dance community to help maintain a much-needed range in artists and viewers. At present, Wayne McGregor is an example of someone who is making an effort to expand that range. After attending two Wayne McGregor Random Dance performances in San Francisco at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and seeing San Francisco Ballet's version of *Chroma*, I can see why he has sparked not only much interest, but also great debate. He is not new to the scene (he has been the Artistic Director of his company for nearly twenty years), but recently his career has skyrocketed with his appointment to the role of Resident Choreographer of the Royal Ballet, becoming an official Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and receiving commissions from some of the more prestigious companies around the world, including Paris Opera Ballet, Bolshoi Ballet, and Australian Ballet. It was eye-opening researching his background and approach to creating dance.

One of the most intriguing facts about McGregor is that he has no classical ballet background. After viewing his work I presumed he was once a ballet dancer since there were frequent cues of the classical aesthetic. I would come to learn that he is considered the "bad boy" of ballet and the

closest thing to a rock star the ballet world has at present. I imagine this image stems from collaborations with artists such as Radiohead, the *Harry Potter* movie franchise, and other pop culture icons. His appointment as Resident Choreographer of the Royal Ballet came as a shock to many. The Royal Ballet's artistic director Monica Mason is quoted in the online *Lebretch Report* saying, "It happened so fast...I had been thinking about the position, putting out feelers, but nothing was quite right for us. Then Wayne came in. I knew about his wide interests, his curiosity about the modern world. And he is such a pleasure to work with: he speaks so inspiringly about what it is to be creative. I decided it was time not to be in boxes. I want to look forward" (*Lebrecht* / December 5, 2006).

It is evident that the effort to move dance forward is at the forefront of McGregor's endeavors. What gives him his niche is his attempt to challenge preconceived ideas of ballet through the utilization of science and technology, pop and cyber culture. This piques the interests of a younger demographic of dance lovers. An example of the emphasis on technology is his collaboration with cognitive neuro-scientist and his dancers—McGregor explored dance in a working environment where distributive creative cognition (gathering ideas through scientific research and organizing them) was used during the choreographic process of his ballet *Entity*.

His curiosity with how the body "misbehaves" and the thought process behind the disruption in brain coordination is also a creative element McGregor utilizes. I imagine making room for mistakes is something that keeps him, as well as many other choreographers, interested in the development of choreographic ideas. This is a luxury for choreographers with their own companies, where the environment is like a laboratory.

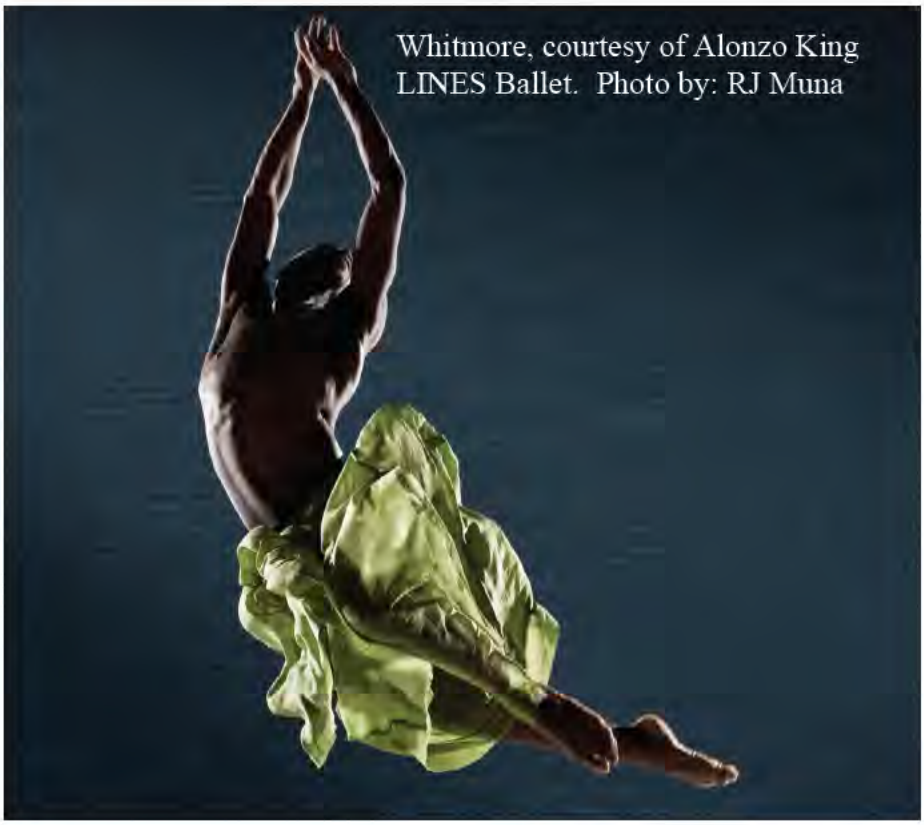
McGregor's *Chroma* provides one such environment. Set on a white stage with a large opening at the back, the dancers use their supple facilities in a way that displays McGregor's movement vocabulary of sharp lines, liquidity through extreme effort, and fierce virtuosity. Before staging *Chroma* at SFB, repetiteur Antoine Vereeken asked the dancers to refrain from watching videos of the original casts at the Royal Ballet. as he did not want them to copy movements. It was encouraging to learn that though every step was choreographed, there was room for interpretation. SFB's James Sofranko explains, "Sometimes Antoine would be trying to get someone to capture the feeling of a step, and the dancer wouldn't exactly do the original step, but Antoine thought it looked more like the right feeling. So the 'correctness' of the step wasn't as important as the feeling behind it."

This is a very interesting observation of the rehearsal process for SFB, and I've noticed vast differences between the two casts of *Chroma* at SFB. The room for personalization based on one's own physical make-up and/or sense of feeling within McGregor's movement vocabulary opens up a new world for the dancers who get to experience ballets such as *Chroma*. He has not only encouraged these dancers to push their bodies to extremes that result in maximal, angular results, but also reaffirmed the validity of each dancer's understanding of the movement. The movement seldom covers space in accord with the sense of sweep and journey found in the music by Joby Talbot and Jack White III, but given McGregor's "laboratory of movement research" approach, it may have been McGregor's intention to create such juxtaposition.

All in all, the dance-makers of today are the guideposts we look to in order see the direction the dance community is going. To answer my own question about whether

certain companies are commissioning choreographers based on hype or invigorating substance, I would say it's a combination of the two. Former Martha Graham Company dancer David Martinez pointed out the fact that every choreographer has a brand—a marketable identity—that makes them commissionable, and still at some point we have to allow these artists room to explore different approaches to dance. I would agree with Martinez that it is important to allow success as well as failure in the creative process of finding one's artistic voice. We must remember that it is our responsibility as creators to help artistically cultivate the viewer and the community of fellow dance artists. Dancemakers should attempt to find new ways to challenge dancers, as well as challenging the viewer's preconceived ideas of dance. The effort is to be commended, but the debate about whether that is happening continues.

Keelan Whitmore is in his sixth season with Alonzo King's LINES Ballet. He began training at the Rockford Dance Company in Illinois, graduated from Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan and also studied at the Joffrey Ballet School/New School University. He danced with Kansas City Ballet for five seasons and with the Suzanne Farrell Ballet. His choreography has been showcased in workshop and gala performances at Kansas City Ballet, Virginia School of the Arts, LINES Ballet Training Program, and Regional Dance America, where he received the 2005 National Choreography Recognition Award. In 2005, Whitmore co-founded the Kansas City-based multi-disciplinary ensemble, Quixotic Fusion. He is currently completing his B.A. with the L.E.A.P. program at St. Mary's College in Moraga, CA.



Whitmore, courtesy of Alonzo King LINES Ballet. Photo by: RJ Muna

Stephanie Powell performing Donald McKayle's *Angelitos Negros*

Celeste Lanuza researching the role in Donald McKayle's autobiography.