

CORPS DE BALLET INTERNATIONAL
ADJUDICATED MEMBER PRESENTATIONS
June 14-16, 2023

SABRINA DELAFIELD

TITLE: *COVID-19 and (Re)ritualizing Ballet Class: Ballet Dancers' pandemic experience from communal embodiment to digital heterotopia transformation*

ABSTRACT:

Professional ballet dancers' lives follow repetitive patterns moving from class, to rehearsals, to performances. Within this regimented existence, the morning ballet class provides the essential ritual on which dancers and the artform depend: transforming them over decades and providing the daily practice that supports their performance of superhuman feats and deep emotional offerings onstage. Yet, with the first COVID-19 lockdowns, professional ballet dancers' routines of practice and performance abruptly stopped. How did ballet dancers navigate the collapse of boundaries and digitization of ballet class as an institution? Did the digital transformation of class challenge historical politics, hierarchies, and practices of ballet class? How did dancer's recreate community in online spaces? This research offers a cross-disciplinary theoretical approach to investigate these questions interweaving Foucault's 'Cloud' Heterotopia with theories of ritual and community to argue that ballet dancers' reimagining of ballet class during the pandemic reveals class' position as an essential institution for ballet dancers. Supported by in-depth ethnographic interviews with dancers from the Deutsche Ballett am Rhein, Royal Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, and Wiener Staatsopera this paper connects professional dancers' experiences of the communal aspect of embodied class to major theories of ritual juxtaposed with the digital practice necessitated by the pandemic. This transformation highlights how ballet dancers utilized physical, audio and digital tools to re-create and transform class with new found digital agency fostering independence and transnational connections in 'Cloud' Heterotopias.

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ILANA GOLDMAN

TITLE: *Contemporary Ballet Teaching Methodology*

ABSTRACT:

As a former professional ballet dancer who specialized in contemporary ballet, I am often asked to teach classes in that form. Having very little experience taking contemporary ballet classes as a student, I was at a loss as to how to approach it pedagogically. I discovered that many of my colleagues also found themselves in similar predicaments and set out to develop a contemporary ballet teaching methodology, which started with contemporary ballet classes and eventually extended into week-long workshops for professional ballet company trainee programs and second companies. Guiding all my pedagogical choices was the question: What skills do ballet dancers need to work successfully with contemporary ballet choreographers? To answer this question, I drew from my training in Graham, Limon, and Taylor techniques and composition at The Juilliard School; my participation in Doug Varone's DEVICES and Anne Green Gilbert's Creative Dance workshops; and my work as a dancer with contemporary ballet choreographers Trey McIntyre, Alonzo King, Amy Seiwert, Sidra Bell, Helen Pickett, and Dwight Rhoden (who, along with Desmond Richardson, has developed his own contemporary ballet teaching method 'NIQUE). In this lecture/demonstration, I share the basic principles around which my methodology is based, sample exercises, and my contemporary ballet workshop format, which develops not only physical skills, but collaborative dancemaking techniques. I explain why I include each element and discuss its source. My aim is to give ballet educators tools to create their own contemporary ballet classes and inspire them to investigate their own approaches to teaching contemporary ballet.

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KRISTEN MARRS & REBEKAH CHAPPELL

TITLE: *Dancing Across the Curriculum: Re-imagining ballet class in the liberal arts*

ABSTRACT:

In this paper, we share our re-imaginings of ballet class in a liberal arts educational setting as an ideal place to pursue a holistic educational model in which “technique” includes: the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of dancing; critical thinking and self-reflection in discussion, writing, and movement; and historically-informed and experiential understanding of the genre. In this practice, students are encouraged to acknowledge how internal and external factors inform their embodiment and dance experience. Our approach promotes individual agency, choice-making, and exploration while centering an intentional, relational community of support. We take cues from Writing Across the Curriculum philosophies, as well as musician and Alexander Technique teacher Pedro de Alcantara, who defines technique as an intersection of perception, intention, and gesture.

We will share teaching strategies, classroom exercises, and sample assignments, demonstrating practical application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks. While ballet in higher education has often been framed as “fitting a round peg into a square hole,” we celebrate the liberal arts educational framework for enabling us to effectively and experimentally teach outside traditional ballet pedagogical norms. We also identify our challenges of teaching ballet in higher education, and offer our strategies for navigating through institutional bureaucracy and norms.

Our process explicitly names collective and individual “ballet baggage:” we acknowledge the harmful impact of systemic white supremacy, patriarchy, the politics of appearance, ableism, and fatphobia at the start of the semester and dismantle these by cultivating structures that support communal healing, individual growth, and improvement of a comprehensively defined ballet technique.

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BRUCE MCCORMICK

TITLE: *The Future of Teaching Ballet Partnering: A Focus on Gender*

ABSTRACT:

Several events and shifts over the past few years have catapulted ballet into a new era: the #MeToo movement, revelations of harassment and abuse in ballet companies, a forced pause and separation due to the pandemic, an ongoing racial reckoning that has brought the field's systemic issues to the forefront, the appointments of several women as artistic directors, and dancers within ballet company ranks and training institutions challenging the gender binary and historical norms. As a ballet professor with a professional background, I am asking several questions while preparing my ballet partnering classes, particularly around gender: How can we welcome a variety of gender identities in a form that is based on a binary? How can challenging learned gendered behaviors shift ballet's culture of abusive men and silenced women? How can the institution be inclusive of different interpretations of masculinity and femininity, as well as a spectrum of gender expression? The methodology and content of a ballet partnering class can support the holistic learning of the university student through providing a rigorous experience for all bodies in the room and teaching to those bodies, rather than just teaching the form. Grounded in a literary review, both scholarly to access the theoretical and journalistic to connect with professional trends, this presentation provides a practical, evolving model of a ballet partnering classroom in a university setting that aims to include students of a variety of gender identities and prepare them for the professional world, while challenging the institution in the process.

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GABRIELLE MCNEILLIE & AMY CALDRIDGE

TITLE: *Planning for Parental Leave: Telling Dance Educators' Stories*

ABSTRACT:

With no federally mandated paid parental leave and only 9 states and D.C. that have established paid leave programs, institutions of higher education and other employer organizations have patchwork systems for granting leave. Therefore, Dance Educators must often cull together a combination of paid and unpaid benefits to create a reasonable amount of time off. This fractured system of family leave policies and supports renders families unable to appropriately protect themselves during a particularly sensitive time of physical, mental, and psychosocial needs.

There is little data on this particular subset of educators regarding pregnancy, childbirth, and return to work experiences and this paper aims to provide insights into their experiences navigating family planning and parental leave policies unique to their positions. By leveraging an interdisciplinary team of experts in dance education, family sciences, and health policy, we seek to discover the gaps in leave benefits for the various populations (K-12, Private sector, and Higher Education). By sharing the resulting data with organizations across the country, we hope to increase awareness and urge administrators to create policies that are more supportive of Dance Educators and their families. Additionally, this data could also shed light on the obstacles Dance Educators and their partners face when choosing to have children. Creating equitable spaces in our institutions that honor and support Parents and Families is essential to continued growth as well as recruitment and retention of Women and other marginalized populations in all sectors of Dance Education.

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DEBORAH NORRIS

TITLE: *Women-Made: Educating a Future Generation of Women Ballet Choreographers*

ABSTRACT:

Dance historian, Lynn Garafola's paper 'Where are Ballet's Women Choreographers?' was presented in 1996 at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender conference at the University of Michigan. Nearly three decades on the question is still relevant and unresolved. To explore this issue further a practice led research project was established with students from Rambert School and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland to examine the potential gaps in their education frameworks that potentially impact on their decisions to pursue choreographic careers in ballet. This project culminated for a week-long residency entitled 'Women-Made - the future women choreographers are here!' at St Hilda's College, Oxford. Kate Flatt, Jennifer Jackson, Suzie Crow and Julia Gleich lectured in choreographic methods and concepts, whilst debating the issues surrounding the historical gender bias within ballet's choreographic culture. This paper will examine the educational needs of women to support them as choreographers in today's creative ballet world. Examining the workshops and reflections collected from the participants within the project offers an opportunity to understand educational approaches for choreographing ballet, student observations surrounding the gender imbalance for women ballet-makers, and the potential changes needed within institutions to address this. Referencing key artists Cathy Marston, and Helen Pickett's work as current leaders in the field of narrative ballet, the paper aims to identify their roles as significant women ballet-makers in order to demonstrate how their gendered leadership is influencing a new generation of women choreographers across the wider dance field.

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STEVIE OAKES

TITLE: *What Makes it Contemporary? Teaching Contemporary Ballet Means Tackling Contemporary Issues*

ABSTRACT:

While contemporary ballet conjures implications of exaggerated lines and subverted phrasing formulas, building and expanding on balletic vocabulary seems like only a part of the responsibility in teaching a course entitled "Contemporary Ballet." Designing a new (to me) syllabus meant continuing to center studio practice imbued with a biopsychosocial attention to the content: holistic awareness of the student to create physiological safety with ample, evidence-based conditioning and injury prevention protocols; to address psychological space for challenging antiquated attitudes and promoting bodily autonomy; and to co-create an environment that reorganizes balletic practice around feminist and liberationist pedagogical principles. But contemporary ballet goes beyond a technical exploration. We are doing more than building on a balletic tradition.

Contemporary - belonging to the present - implies a direct attention to the current issues and cultural themes. How, then, does the combination of course work elements - studio training, reading and viewing assignments, reflection in writing and discussion - translate off of the syllabus page and in to ballet d'ACTION? I use my course preparation and execution from the Fall 2022 semester as a case study in the enacting of this 'contemporariness.' Employing an Action Research model - following the cycle of action and reflection in PRAXIS - I hope to unpack planning and experience in modules of study that range from 'Arriving to the Dance,' 'Stabilizing to Mobilize,' and 'Contemporary Stories.' To approach stability, for example, we examine regional anatomy alongside mindfulness and principles of community resilience. I look forward to discussing results grounded in theoretical frames from literature review, embodied approaches in movement, and student reflection.

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PABLO PIANTINO

TITLE: *The Deconstruction of the Ballet Trained Body: Finding Access for Contemporary Dance*

ABSTRACT:

Ever since I started dancing, ballet was the only physical training I ever had and it quickly became a pinnacle of aesthetic beauty and physical prowess. In my young mind, ballet was the foundation necessary for all good dancing. These ideals were ingrained in me by many of my teachers and also assumed within the institutional culture where I danced. I am a re-stager of contemporary dance and a ballet and contemporary dance educator. I have a great understanding and respect for the ballet form. However, my own professional artistic journey has been a process of deconstruction of implicit assumptions ingrained in my ballet-trained body. Classical Ballet is inherently presentational, and the type of contemporary dances that I re-stage, are quite the opposite, much more introspective and intuitive. The point in these works is not to present a context for the overt display of virtuosity, but to let movement and the interactions between dancers unfold in an emergent way, allowing the choreography to speak for itself. This paper is written from my research and teaching experiences, as I offer new perspectives from which to look at ballet training and performance, both in academia and the professional ballet world. The deconstruction and liberation of the ballet trained body is an important aspect that needs to be addressed, not only to find access for contemporary dance, but also to diversify and bring new knowledge in the evolution of ballet.

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ALLEGRA ROMITA & NANCY ROMITA

TITLE: *Equity-informed alignment cueing for external rotation & pelvic neutral to support the ballet aesthetic through Functional Awareness®*

ABSTRACT:

Dance educators are poised to lead the field toward equity-informed cueing and movement coaching that honor and lift up all gender identification. Some traditional alignment cueing is unwittingly laced with implicit gender bias. The presenters are challenging historical perspectives in anatomy that perpetuate the male/female dichotomy. This presentation provides cueing strategies through anatomical visualizations as a method to support student agency and honor all bodies as they embrace the joys of the ballet form. The focus of this interactive presentation examines the structural differences in the pelvis and hip joint and provides strategies to enhance turnout and discover integrity of pelvic neutral for greater efficacy in the ballet aesthetic. Additionally, the presentation examines how unconscious daily actions can support or compromise a student's agency to accept the body they live in. Specifically, the presentation incorporates the Functional Awareness® pedagogical philosophy that embraces diversity and inclusion during embodied movement practice and utilizes specific verbal cueing to support body autonomy in dance training. The participants will learn cueing that moves away from Eurocentric binary imagery and moves toward inclusive approaches in coaching dynamic alignment and movement skills. The Functional Awareness 4Rs reflective practice is introduced as an approach to self-agency that nurtures nonjudgment, acceptance, and mental and physical balance. The participants will walk away with specific strategies to be utilized in classroom training to improve dance skills and body autonomy.

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KARA ROSEBOROUGH

TITLE: *Ballet Artivism*

ABSTRACT:

"Ballet Artivism" is a lecture demonstration that investigates how ballet technique, performance, education, and culture can take actionable social and racial justice steps that decentralize discriminatory and white supremacist practices. Specifically, the lecture will explore actionable steps of racial and cultural inclusivity at the artistic and institutional levels and empowering BIPOC students within predominantly white institutions; touching on culturally relevant teaching, BIPOC representation in leadership, and active community engagement. The talk will consider how academic pedagogical theory can be implemented into daily practice within and outside of academia and will explore the translation of these theories into the concert dance world in particular. The lecture will engage with Bell Hook's "Teaching to Transgress" and Nyama McCarthy-Brown's "Dance Pedagogy for a Diverse World." "Ballet Artivism" is inspired by the speaker's experience with the dancer-lead, grass-roots DEI organization Dancers Amplified and their personal experience as a BIPOC ballet dancer. It will devise ways in which the integrity of ballet-focused programs and ballet-dominant companies can be maintained while dismantling antiquated, anti-BIPOC practices. The presentation will include a video and a PowerPoint presentation and can take place in conference room or auditorium setting. The lecturer hopes to offer a dual perspective as a BIPOC student and academic leader while inspiring continued action and accountability as the CORPS de Ballet Conference celebrates its 25th anniversary and looks ahead at the many years to come.

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TYLER SCHNESE

TITLE: *A Queer Reimagining of Afternoon of a Faun*

ABSTRACT:

Institutions of higher education provide unique opportunities for dance artists to engage with scholars in other fields. In "A Queer Reimagining of Afternoon of a Faun" I document my graduate thesis project threading queer theory, postmodernism, and affect theory with the creative process of choreography. The work of theorist José Esteban Muñoz, particularly his concepts of queer futurity and homonormativity, provides theoretical framework within the creative process. The power of queerness (and queer stories) is that it reveals norms, often through painful experiences of difference, while pointing to a future which has yet to come.

The title of my work "Afternoon of a Fag" reappropriates the word "fag," inspired by scholars reclaiming the word "queer" through queer theory. In queering a canonical work, I aim to tell a story rooted in queer experience, attentive to the past and critiquing a present, that will innately speak to queer viewers. While the original 1912 ballet was radical in portraying a sexual awakening, my reimagining of the ballet portrays a radical act of self-acceptance, liberating discourse on shame and queering ballet's tendency to center a romantic relationship as the narrative focus.

As postmodern and queer theoretical tools are already in use by choreographers and creators across multiple fields, the paper examines the work of Sara K. Whitfield and Vida L. Midgellow, writers who have both critiqued musical theater and dance productions through the lens of postmodern and queer theory. Additionally, a brief overview is taken of the queer ballet field of today.

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MARIA SOLERA

TITLE: *Expanding American Ballet Throughout the Continent*

ABSTRACT:

The great events that marked the history of ballet in America took place at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1913 the famous Diaghilev's Ballet Russes performed in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil and later in the United States in 1916. However, ballet would change the United States with the arrival of George Balanchine a Russian choreographer and dancer. Balanchine's arrival led to the creation of the School of American Ballet in 1934, and the development of the Balanchine technique. This ballet evolution is fascinating, however, as a dancer born in a Central American country, one wonders why this technique or style called American is so foreign to the rest of the countries of the continent. American ballet schools and teachers of the American style are not found outside of the United States. It is also difficult for companies to access the repertoire of American choreographers due to the selection process being difficult and cost-prohibitive. These restrictions make it difficult for the rest of the continent to feel interested in learning about this technique. Russian teachers did manage to expand to more countries in Central and South America, so why did not the same thing happen with American teachers? In this presentation. What can the community of dancers do to begin to expand the American school in America? These questions are the ones I intend to answer at this conference.

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JENNIFER WEBER

TITLE: *Learning-Centered Teaching in the Face of a Vastly Changing Future*

ABSTRACT:

The global pandemic tore across the world disrupting life as we knew it and in its wake revealed truths that had been brewing. The dance world did not escape this reality or scrutiny. Inequities in dance education demanded attention and divides around access deepened as the world struggled to enter a post-pandemic world. While we are still living in a pandemic, now is the time to evaluate approaches in dance education. There is now an opportunity to imagine a different future. Learning-centered teaching, as defined by Maryellen Weimer, a distinguished educator and scholar, focuses attention on what the student is learning, how the student is learning, the conditions under which the student is learning, whether the student is retaining and applying the learning, and how current learning positions the student for future learning. Learning-centered teaching is not a new concept in education and while parallel strategies can be found in dance education there is very little scholarship on learning-centered teaching in ballet education. This proposed workshop offers an opportunity to explore these concepts within the framework of ballet and one's personal pedagogy. Research demonstrates that learning-centered teaching is an inclusive, evidence-based approach ending with lifelong learners, motivated to be responsible for their learning. This is an approach that can challenge and support institutional systems. In the workshop, there will be space and activities that explore the effectiveness and practicality of learning-centered teaching for each participant to decide if it could be a tool to both dream and meet responsibilities.

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AMANDA WHITEHEAD

TITLE: *The Archive, the Repertoire, and the Academy: Giovanni-Léopold-Adice's 1859 Grammaire and the Ballet Manual as a Marker of Institutional Legitimacy*

ABSTRACT:

In 1859, veteran Paris Opéra performer and school instructor Giovanni-Léopold Adice publishes an impassioned volume declaring that French ballet is at a turning point. Foreign-born stars dominate the Opéra stage and the standard of training at the associated Conservatory is falling. Adice attributes this to the fact that “[d]ance does not yet have a positive basis, established principles, theoretical documents” (Adice 1859, 6-7). The solution, he proposes, is to identify and record the principles and mechanisms of professional dance training in written form. In this approach, Adice places a systematically recorded training curriculum within what performance studies scholar Diana Taylor (2003) calls “the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)” (Taylor 2003, 19). With this positioning come all of the archive’s attendant myths of stability and objectivity. In true Western European logocentric fashion, Adice also place his written materials in a hierarchical position superior to those of the “repertoire” (Taylor 2003) of performative acts that have primarily transmitted ballet training until his writing, because he feels that these acts have failed his institutions: “To guide the pupils, the teachers have only speech, and for inspiration only tradition” (Adice 1859, 6). I will use Taylor’s concept of the archive and the repertoire to consider how written ballet curricula, from their very emergence, were more than simply a record of embodied training practices. They were documents that aspired to special status within ballet institutions via positive associations with the written word and ideas of regularization, containment, and power.

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