Dancing to the End: Dancers on Their Dreams

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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PURPOSE OF THESIS

The purpose of this study is to attempt to show the art of dancing in a positive light. After a brief discussion of dancing and why dancers choose to dance, there are ten interviews of dancers, including students, teachers, and professionals from a wide variety of styles. These interviews were then edited into a narrative to allow each dancer to "tell" his/her own story about why he/she chose to dance.
for the

Banevolks,
past and future
Art is the only way to run away without leaving home.

--Twyla Tharp

Dancing is the loftiest, the most moving, the most beautiful of the arts, because it is no mere translation or abstraction from life; it is life itself.

--Havelock Ellis

The place of the dance is within the heart.

--Tim Robbins

The real reason I dance is...because I want to explode.

--Bill Evans

The only reality is my dancing.

--Rudolf Nureyev
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INTRODUCTION

This is a work about dreams. Dreams which many have, but few can accomplish. For many children, becoming a dancer is a tremendous dream. I was one of those little girls who slaved away at weekly dance lessons, only to quit years later when I realized I did not have the drive to become a dancer. I learned you could only be a dancer if you were fully committed to dancing. You had to take more classes and spend more time in training which meant giving up other activities, friends, and even time with your family. Not willing to give those things up, I left the world of dance when I was in junior high school. I became involved with dance again in college, and only then did I realize that dancing really is more than pink ballet shoes and yearly dance recitals. Dancing is a way of life.

Twyla Tharp describes in her book Push Comes to Shove how dancing became a way of life for her:

I was coming to define myself as a dancer, much as I fought off the discovery. From the tattered practice clothes to the talk of ruthless competition for the few paying jobs available, there was clearly no financial security in a dance career. In 1963 a corps member of a professional company earned one hundred and ten dollars a week. Also, as a near graduate of an Ivy League school I harbored the intellectual snobbery with which so much of our culture looks at both the dancer and the athlete, pronouncing them dumb. Still, I proceeded to dance, because of all the things I could do, dancing was the thing I could do best and enjoyed the most (55).

While dance was, and still is, not a practical choice for a career, Tharp finally admits that from all her training and dedication toward dance, “There was no choice: I was
becoming a dancer” (57). And in talking with many dancers, I heard the same story over and over: “My friend dragged me to class.” “People would tell me, ‘You know, you’re a very good dancer.’ So I started dancing.” “I guess I had this vision that I was in dancing school...” Nobody intended to be a dancer, but once they started dancing, they could not stop.

Melissa Hayden opens her book Dancer to Dancer with the line, “I couldn’t live without dancing” (3). During my short career as a folk dancer, I suddenly found myself thrown into a world of dancers, all of whom would swear by Hayden’s belief. In looking at their sweaty clothes, bandaged toes and legs, and bulky bags full of dance shoes, I couldn’t help but wonder why anyone would sacrifice so much for a career. I knew from experience that few dancers would have enough talent to become professionals. The amount of time and effort that each of these people had put into their work was enormous, and the paybacks seemed slim.

However, some could easily become professionals, especially if they were men. Edward Villella, currently the artistic director of the Miami City Ballet, became a dancer by chance. His sister had auditioned for George Balanchine’s School of American Ballet, and his mother happened to mention that Edward also liked to dance. “In those days, my heavens, a boy!” he says about the experience (Mason 250). Typically, society looks down on male dancers and stereotypes them as homosexuals. In fact, choreographer George Balanchine often said, “Dance is woman.” Igor Youskevitch, who danced for Balanchine for some time, said, “As a matter of fact, I agree with him in a way, because basically woman is born to dance, even if she is not a dancer. But art exists for both sexes; there must be equality” (Mason 299).

Ballerina Gelsey Kirkland tells in her autobiography Dancing on my Grave how she sacrificed everything, and almost her life, to become a dancer. During the
beginning of her training, she regularly inflicted torture on her own body to force her legs to extend more, creating a specific "line" that was essential to ballet. She also distorted her knees and hips in order to create a better "turn-out," a pose where the dancer places her heels together and rotates her thighs so that the feet will approach a one hundred eighty degree angle (33-4). Kirkland also had bouts with bulimia (167) and became addicted to cocaine in order to continue dancing. She was so concerned with the image of a ballerina that she would do anything to maintain that desired thin body. "...the relationship between the dancer and her mirror image is an intimacy of extraordinary power and potentially perilous consequence. Most dancers ultimately seem to drown themselves in their own images, pushed by forces unseen" (73). Even George Balanchine used to tell his female dancers, "I think you're getting a little fat." When they responded that they were, in fact, dieting, he would tell them not to eat anything at all. And in order to remain in his company, they followed his orders, even if that meant risking their health (Mason 312). Why would anyone sacrifice that much for something that most likely would not yield personal and financial success?

That basic question led me to do this paper. I interviewed ten dancers from different areas of dance in order to hear views from students, teachers, and performers. I asked them these basic questions: How did you get involved with dance? What motivated you to become a dancer? What kind of support did you get from your family after making this decision? What kind of training have you had? What is your favorite style of dance? Have you had any injuries, physical and/or emotional setbacks because of dance? What is your worst fear as a dancer? Have you made any special sacrifices to become a dancer? What do you plan to do after you can no longer function as a dancer? I also asked spontaneous questions during the interview to gain further information. The narratives here are their words so
that each dancer has the opportunity to tell his/her own story. Although I attempted to cover a wide variety of dancers, I think this work could be expanded into something much larger, for there are many more insights into the art of dancing.

The dancers I interviewed were frank and honest. "Dance is all I've been concentrating on my whole life; it's all I want to do," says the student. "I really don't care to exist without it," admits the teacher. These people describe what dance does for them. "The performance keeps you going." "I've always wanted to be an artist all my life." When I asked if something would happen where he/she couldn't dance, most of these dancers were dumbfounded for a moment. The thought of not dancing never really occurred to them. Injuries, though sometimes ending careers, were taken with stride as an everyday precaution. "I haven't had anything majorly serious--knock on wood..." "...once you have a back injury, it's always going to be reoccurring, but you just got to know your limit, when to stop." Some talked about emotional injuries as well. "I have a really bad image of the way I look..." Others talked about lack of support from family members. "My parents didn't like the idea of me going to school to be a dancer." "I didn't talk to my dad for about two and a half years..." Yet they continued to dance. "I have no desire to ever quit." "It's just a drive that keeps me alive." The excitement and eagerness to talk about their careers show that these people truly love what they do.

Dancing for these people is a dream made reality. Even though these dancers spend large amounts of time, energy, and money into their work, they all strive to become the best dancer they can be in order to fulfill their dreams. I was amazed to hear how willing they were to sacrifice friends and social lives for their love of dance. Perhaps Bill Ebbesmeyer sums it up best, "...it's just something that I have to do. I gotta do it, and I gotta do it until I die."
"Sometimes a dancer will ask herself as she stares down at her taped and tired feet...what ever made her put on these odd satin pink shoes? And as she laces up her shoes and walks out on to the floor the music begins. And it's as if she never knew anything but the thrill of moving her body, extending her soul...through the points of the feet."

--Capezio advertisement
TRACY E. GREENO

She is somewhat short and very muscular. She has been dancing since she was three. At this interview she was twenty-one and preparing to graduate from college.

I started with tap and ballet in little shoes. My mom and dad's neighbor kid was interested, so she kind of dragged me to class, and I liked it so I continued. That was kind of like a competition school, so I stayed there for about two years, and then I transferred to an ex-Rockette, then I dropped out and went back in with her, and then I ended up at a serious, serious training school for ballet, and that's where I first got introduced to modern and a few other things. I was in a training program until I developed. Then I hit puberty and developed and got wonderful boobs that most people envy, but my dance teacher put me in a corner with the twelve and thirteen-year-olds, when I was like, fourteen. And in high school I was with the junior high kids, so she basically just screwed me without saying anything. The only good thing she could say was that I had really good arches, and she didn't say that until the summer after I left.

I stopped for about a year in grade school—fourth to fifth grade because I was like, "Well, maybe I'll be softball champ or something." Yeah, right. But I always went back to it. And I choreographed my first piece in sixth grade. I did "Stray Cat Strut."

I'm in Ball State Dance Theatre, and I'm choreographing for a play. I love choreographing. It's something I'm geared toward. I'm dancing about six or seven hours a day, every day. And when I get out of Ball State, I'm going to audition to see what I can get, see what options I have. Companies, schools, dinner theater, that kind of thing. I've already been told I'm too short for some things and too stocky for others.

Like what?
Some of the dance companies. They want girls who are at least 5'5" to 5'9". I'm 5'2", 5'2 1/2" on a good day. I'm also interested in dance therapy because it's something where I can see the results right away. That's why I like choreography so much.

I like dance. It's a way of life. It sounds gay, but the things you can't get out, you get out through dance. You try and...you feel better if you're having a really bad day, and sometimes it helps—I mean, sometimes it makes it worse—but usually if you have something to concentrate and focus on and it's just, I don't know. If I can dance and be happy and just create things whether it be my body or whether it be a dance or whatever. It's like you have this little power and you have this little thing that you want to use to make people smile or happy or...The performance is what keeps you going. You can go to class for years and years and years and if you never perform, you're going to lose the drive, more than likely. But if you perform and you know that rush, that's what you're working for, the rush.

I love ballet. I love it because it's so fairy tale, it's so romantic. You're lighter than air, but you know it took years of training to get up there. It's kind of an oxymoron: It really hurts, but it's really cool.

I was about eleven or twelve, I guess, when I first went on pointe. Everybody else in the class was like, "Yes! We get to go on pointe!" and I'm going, "No, man, no! No! I don't want to go on pointe. I don't want to go on pointe. It hurts. That's no fun." You go up on the tips of your toes, you roll through your arches—you need to have strong arches—you have to keep your feet over your toes, and all your weight is on your big toe. Imagine every ounce of weight on the tips of your toes, and your toes are surrounded by wood. But, I mean, I like pointe. I have really strong legs, so I can go through a pair of shoes real quick, and my feet...I rearranged them. The school I went to said you have to wear these shoes that weren't made for
my feet, so my pinky toe kind of said hello to my fourth toe real painfully. I've got lots of scars and everything.

And you like this?

I don't like it, but the look is very pretty. The look and the style are very elegant, graceful, and it is like a fairy tale because who walks on their toes besides Michael Jackson?

Injuries? How many lists do you want? I've had hairline fractures in my foot; I've bent my ankle in—twisted it severely; I've had severe problems with hamstrings, like them pulling out of my knee socket. I've had problems with my feet—like the pinky toe. I almost had to have surgery to have a metal pin put in to keep it straight. I haven't had anything majorly serious—knock on wood—like screwing up your knee totally, like totally ripping it to hell. I've never broken a bone. I have hairline fractures, so I kind of have to be careful of how I land on that foot. Day to day it's hamstrings, toe shoes, and pointe—they kind of botch up your toes a little bit. Just the hamstrings and ankles...I have to be careful, make sure they're strong. And when I start getting really tired, I have to really watch how much weight I put on to what and how quick I move.

Emotional injuries? Yeah, I never think of them though. I have a really bad image of the way I look because, you know, for most people in everyday life, this is an OK look, this is pretty good, but for a dancer I'm either too short, too fat, too... and that's kind of hard to get rejected because one teacher likes you because of this and not because of that. You don't know, I mean, every teacher's going to be different, on what they think. You kind of put that in your gear and try to give it all you can. I had a bout with bulimia my freshman year. It's my first semester, freshman year in college. I couldn't eat the dorm food because dorm food just made me sick, and I was dancing a lot, trying to change everything, and I was so nervous. I
was getting sores in my mouth and I was looking very poorly and my mom said, "Excuse me. You've gone down about ten pounds. You don't look healthy. What's up?" So I had to gain about twenty pounds to get back to health.

I push myself to do the best I think I can, which probably isn't as good as I can do. In fact Michael Worcel (one of her teachers) told me, he's like, "Your worst problem is self confidence." I'm always struggling with myself to try and overcome what I see are my problems or what I've been told and which has gotten into my subconscious, and I've just got to get over the image thing and say, "Yes, I can do it," instead of going, "Ohhhh, I don't feel like it today." Days I want to stay in bed? Those are the days after you've worked really really hard and you're laying in bed and you're like, "I'm not moving. It hurts to move. I'm not moving. Comforter's way too warm." But you slowly get your butt out of bed and you slowly put on those tights and you slowly make your way to class and then you whine, you moan. It's not your best day, but you do it because you know you have to, and that's the whole point. You know you have to, so you do it.

I don't mind competition. I mean it's a good thing because it makes you just try and top them, but what I hate is when it's heavy handed competition whereas you know you're walking in and you're playing politics, and you know you can't compete with politics. If they took you on merit or if they took you on what you can do, fine. But if they kind of go, "Well..." Competition with others is not that bad, it's expected. You try and go in there and be the most original yet alike you can.

You have to sacrifice your friends, your social life. I mean I go out when I want to, but back in high school, I danced, did homework, came home, slept, started the whole day over again. You have friends you don't hang around with in big groups after school and you sacrifice a lot of free time, but you get something out of it that's...you did something that you're trying, you're following your dream, you're
trying to succeed, you’re trying to make your mark, and I haven’t thought exactly where my mark’s going to be made or how I’m going to do it, but I know I’m not going to give up until something happens. That’s the thing that keeps you going, knowing that some possibility is out there.

You keep searching for that signature piece, that signature style that is yours, and I think I’ve finally found it with my senior project, the one I just did, which is a very lyrical, flowing, expressive style. I can do happy dance, I can do sexy dance. I like the slow lyrical movement because it’s just so beautiful in the way it flows from one thing to another. That’s what I like.

You can’t model yourself after somebody. You can aspire to be like them or inspire somebody else to look like them and say, “Hey, this is a neat little thing, this is a neat little thing.” But for anybody you have as a teacher or you’ve watched, you take a little bit of whatever you see and make it yours, whatever it may be. I think you take a little something out of everything you ever learn. I love Steven King. He looks at human relationships a lot as how the different people relate, I like the way he weaves his stories, his people. Sometimes it gets confusing, but life has never been a straight and narrow path, so it keeps me going. I like to explore human relationships, how everybody dances around each other. Whatever perks my curiosity, I guess. Curiosity killed the cat, you know.

Half of the reward comes in knowing you did the best you could do and somebody recognized it, whether it be in class or in the senior projects when someone came up to me and said, “Wow!” I mean, a couple of teachers said, “Wow, I can’t believe you have a brain.” That was the best...knowing that they actually finally took a look at me...a real look at me and my work. They finally saw it.

I’m looking into dance therapy and massage therapy, working with the elderly and children who are disabled. Something that would give back to others. I think
that would be the most beneficial thing I could ever do for myself and the community. As far as a job related thing, I don’t know. It depends on what would happen to make me not function as a dancer. I would quit dancing only if I was in a car crash or an injury that enabled me to sit in a wheelchair and not dance or not be able to move where I want to move. I’m not saying I still want to be able to lift my leg up to my shoulder, but if somebody took away my dance, that’s my biggest fear. I could fall on my face several times on stage...it happens...it would take something big like a car crash. Dance is all I’ve been concentrating on my whole life; it’s all I want to do. Becoming a professional is just a whole other ball game, and I hope I’m ready for it once I get out of here. My goal is just getting out of school, not competing or making money out of it yet.
DAWN L. DYSON

She is a senior dance major at Ball State University. We spoke together twice about her dancing and career.

I found out that I have a good chance of being a folk dancer. I've talked with Ya'akov Eden, and he said he would help me by going to dance camps and doing special research with him and learning all the culture and backgrounds. I'm taking as much technique as I can get from him, so hopefully I'll get into folk dance. If not, maybe some dinner theater type shows where you just dance.

My sister had a really small dance school that I took from for about 15 years, but it was one of those small dance schools where there's no real technique, and she really doesn't have a lot of knowledge—she started it when she was fifteen, so she didn't have the knowledge. I only took three classes and they were only half hour classes, so I had a very minor background, and I came to Ball State and learned everything here. I had ballet which was not great ballet, tap, jazz, and she had learned some Hawaiian, and we did some, I would call them a character folk, where she made up the styling herself. We used real music, but we had no clue. We did some Spanish and some Japanese or something like that...weird stuff.

My theater director had been at Ball State and he knew there was a dance major here, and he thought instead of not going to college and not doing anything with my life, I should come to school. He thought I had what it took as far as patience, and I think he was right. I'm glad I made the decision. My theater director got me involved in the theater program. (in high school) I danced in all the dances and did choreography for him, and he encouraged me a lot. My parents didn't like the idea of me going to school to be a dancer. They didn't really want me to do that. They wouldn't have minded if I would like open a studio or something, but they didn't really want me to do that. So it was basically through him.
It's different now because my parents have seen how much I've changed, and I have let them know my other options, although every once in a while my mother hints, like last year she hinted, "Can you change your major to teaching and be a school teacher?" Or, "Can you do this?" and, "Can you do that?" And for a while I had a business minor just to please them, but I didn't like it. But I've kind of gotten them calmed down because I found out possibilities for my future, and they're OK.

I didn't really get into ethnic until I got here, and that's my favorite right now. I think Russian and all the Russian is what I'm leaning towards. I went to Maine Folk Dance Camp. (this summer) I was there for three weeks, and two weeks was actually dancing. I had dance classes all day, and then at night they'd have a big dance party thing. They would just run music, and everybody jumps up and dances. At the dance parties they did anything and everything including what they learned that day. One week we learned Scottish and English and Bulgarian and Armenian, and the other week we learned Israeli, Macedonian, Hungarian, American. I learned how to pick up dances really quick that I had never done before because at the dance parties, especially the second week I was there, a lot of the people had been doing this for a long time, and they just do them from common knowledge. Just knowing basic steps and being able to follow what other people do, being able to see across the circle and do what they do, even though it's opposite, helped me do that.

The camp helped me to figure out that's what I wanted to do because it's so easy for me and I really enjoy that and don't have to worry about anything as much I as have to for other styles of dance. I am more natural with that. I want to audition for folk dance companies and hopefully get in as a performer. I'm going to see Aman (a folk troupe), and they're in Los Angeles. They don't specialize in a certain region. I plan on auditioning for them because they have a three section company.
One tours, one does little touring, and one stays right there. I would like to travel, but personally I’ll take anything I can get because I’m not so sure I’d like Los Angeles.

My senior project is a Ukrainian hopak. It’s kind of a challenge because I’ve never had to choreograph folk dance, and you have a lot more boundaries. You have to do certain steps, you can’t just do any step you want. It has to be a step Ukrainian people would do or something similar. That doesn’t mean I can’t make up some of my own steps in some places, but I can’t be throwing in stuff that looks Serbian or I can’t clog. And I have to stick with basic rules of folk dance which I never dealt with, like dances that in a recreational setting would go in a circle have to stay in a circular pattern on stage; you can’t just break out into a diagonal or line. It’s kind of a challenge, but I’m getting a lot of help as far as where to do my research, what to look at, getting books, videos, movies, everything I can think of. It’s fun. It’s definitely my favorite type. I’m glad I did that instead of another form of dance because it’s a lot easier for me. Once I decide what I’m going to do, it tends to flow pretty well.

Why are so many dancers concerned with weight?

Well, it’s like when you’re onstage and you have to wear some of those costumes that are...that you can see everything anyway—it’s really a self-conscious thing. And basically, I don’t think any of the dancers here are too underweight. My roommate’s a nutrition major, and she says I’m underweight, but it’s not a dangerous level. And as far as dancers, most dancers are at least five pounds underweight. I’ve maintained my weight this whole year, and I’ve never had to worry about gaining lots of it back. It’s mostly retoning muscles is what it should be instead of losing lots of weight.

Sometimes I just want to take a vacation. I was thinking about this today. I
just wanted to stay at home and lay in bed and watch TV and not think about doing anything or doing any homework or do anything or go anywhere and then I'd be ready to go back. Once in a while I think I need to do that.

*What brings you back?*

Boredom sometimes, and when you’re not doing it, you still think about it because you still have pictures on the wall or music that you’ve always thought, "I’m going to do a dance to that someday." And your dance clothes, and even though sometimes you don’t want to wear, after you don’t wear them, it’s like, “Gosh, I wish I had those on again.” All those things...being in shape. I like to feel like I’m healthy.

I don’t know, sometimes it’s almost like I’m showing off because usually I’ve improved a lot and I like to--I have a lot of fun. Sometimes I can see the audience, but I really like it when I’m just blinded with the light and it feels like I’m somewhere totally different. It’s not like in the studio where it’s all calm and relaxed. We’ve got costumes and makeup, and it’s just really exciting. And even if you’re in dance after dance, you’ve got so much adrenaline going you don’t care. You just want to go out there and go for it.

For right now the overall payoff will be when I get a job in a professional company and get paid. That would be wonderful. I’d be so happy to have money and have my own house. That’d be really nice. It would be like proving something.
DAVID REUILLE

When he graduates from college, he will be twenty-four years old. He has been dancing for four years. "I basically started it because I used to go to parties and people would tell me, 'You know, you're a very good dancer.' So I started dancing."

On the average he dances seven to nine hours a day, six days a week.

I took my first ballet class with Kay Knight, and she really got me excited about it because I was an artist and I was really frustrated at the time with the fact I didn’t feel like I could do with my art what I wanted to do. I felt limited with my art, I felt like I was going to have to not be a fine artist, I was going to have to be some person that worked in some textile factory making textiles, and this, that, and the other. That’s just not what I wanted to do. I wanted to be an artist. I’ve always wanted to be an artist all my life. I’ve known that since when I was really young. And Kay made me realize that dance was an art form and that I could express myself that way.

My mom wasn’t too happy with the whole idea of me being a dancer. She wanted me to go to college to make money and this, that, and the other. She was more supportive than my dad, however. My mom and my dad have been divorced for a long time. I seriously tried to tell him about it, and he was going off about it, "He’s a man, he’s twenty-one years old, what’s he doing dancing?" I didn’t talk to my dad for about two and a half years after that simply because I wasn’t secure enough in my concept that I wanted to be a dancer. I wasn’t secure enough with myself to convince anybody else that I was going to do it, so I didn’t want anybody close to me telling me that I shouldn’t be doing it. But now he seems to understand-the only thing he seems to understand about it is that you can make money at it, so that’s what his big deal was. He thought I wouldn’t make any money at it.

You can make $300 a week. I could live easy on $300 a week because I live on
about $200 a month right now. I'm not interested in making a lot of money, but there are opportunities to make a lot of money if you'd like to make a lot of money. If you get into a musical theater touring company like Cats or Phantom of the Opera where you're dancing in that, you can make up to $40,000, $80,000 a year.

My favorite style? I don't know. I like ballet and modern specifically because I think I've had the most training in ballet and modern. I don't want to limit myself by saying that my body is more suited to modern, but I always seem to. Recently I've come to realize that modern is the same as ballet, just a different stylistic approach. Jazz is the same way. I have problems with jazz right at the moment because of all the isolations. I just haven't done it as long to really have the mental connections that I need to have, but I'm getting better at it.

I have had problems with my body changing, and that's just a slow process. Any dancer's body takes time to develop the muscles in order to move them around and use them every day. Just recently, I've begun to really find my inner thighs, which, with the center in your abdominals, is the strength in anything in dancing, and that has just changed my body completely. I've lengthened my legs out. I have really short legs, which is a problem for dancers. Not a problem, but it's not the "look" that everybody wants. You want to have long legs and long arms, and I don't. I have a long torso and short legs. So I have to continually make my legs look longer than they are, and I really have to stretch my legs out so they do look long.

I don't do any weight training simply because I've seen dancers that have done weight training, and to me they lose a certain amount of flexibility, a certain amount of release, not being able to release. When you do weight training, you are lifting a static weight. You are lifting it to one point and never past that. To me it's detrimental because it's the opposite of what a dancer does. You're always going,
always stretching past that point. I do do push ups and I do work out. I do so much physical exercise that I don't feel that I need to do extra exercises. Maybe I'm wrong because I know there's a lot of people that feel the opposite, that they want their bodies to be perfectly toned, and this, that, and the other, and want their abdominals ribbed. I think that that is just a side effect. If that happens when you're dancing, then that happens, but I'm not going to do something extra to get it.

There's always a transition. In myself I keep reaching these plateaus where I'll be learning a lot and my body will be changing and then I'll reach this plateau where I'm on the same level forever, and maybe I'll just drop back my technique or my dancing or whatever you want to call it. It drops down a level from what it was. You have to get to this plateau, and it's the hardest thing to try and cross it. It's like what runners talk about "hitting the wall." If you continually hit that wall and you don't go past it, then you're never going to get any better. In dancing you're continually hitting stuff like that.

I found that people learn different ways. I learn from understanding, and I have to understand something before I can do it. It would be so nice if everybody, including yourself, could listen all the time and understand everything that someone says because it would be so much easier. But you have people saying the same things to you over and over. Sometimes you block it out or you never really understand it. You don't try and go any farther, or the teacher can't explain it any differently, and you just can't understand it.

Luckily I haven't had any major injuries. I have had twisted ankles before but nothing so severe where I wasn't out more than a day or so. I have had problems though because when you begin dancing, you don't know how to use your body properly. You get into bad habits where you're not doing the right thing, so you injure your body. I had a problem about a year ago with one of my hamstrings
because I wasn’t using my hamstrings properly. Especially during floor exercise I wasn’t sitting on the muscle right, so it got inflamed and I had a pull. Every time I stretched that muscle, it was inflamed. I had problems stretching it, so I had to lay off of using it and stretching it for, actually it didn’t go away for about a year. It took that long for it to go away. But that’s the problem you get into with dancers. You have such a problem laying off of something. You continually have to be in training. I had another problem where I was rolling in on the instep in my foot, and it was same thing as the hamstring. I had a place that was irritated on my foot, and I continually rolled in on there. I irritated that spot, and it never got better. I just had to learn how to use my foot properly, to not roll in. I had the same problem when I was first starting. I wouldn’t point my foot right. So I would get problems in my toes, cramping and stuff in my toes.

Why aren’t there many men in dance?

There’s so many reason why. A lot of it has to do with history. In the beginning dancing was a man’s world. Then the women began to take over, and there was a big slump where there were hardly any men in ballet at all, and they were looked down upon. Then some very good male dancers like Nijinsky and choreographers like George Balanchine came along. I know that around the fifties and sixties there was a lot more interest in dancing in the male, but to tell you the truth, I’m not really sure why. It seems to be that everybody has a preconception of it, and I guess that’s what it is. I don’t know where the preconception is coming from. And when you really get in ballet and in dance you really understand that right now it is a women’s based art form or sport or whatever you want to call it. The women are in control of these things. Maybe it had to do with some of the big name choreographers, the big name dancers, the male dancers who just aren’t around any longer and there’s no one there to take their place. George Balanchine’s
no longer around, and Mikhail Baryshnikov really is no longer director of ABT. (American Ballet Theatre) Nureyev is dead. It just seems like there are not that many male dancers. It's really a shame. I just recently saw Paul Taylor's dance company, and his dance company has very strong, very technically strong, very powerful male dancers, and to see a man dance is a very powerful thing. Not to say that to see a woman dance it can't be powerful as well, but to see a really good male dancer dance is just incredibly powerful because that's what male dancers are really about, and that's what being a man in our society seems to be about: how much power they can have. To see that is just incredible. It's nice to see it compared to what women think the dance is. To me women feel the dance is beauty—it's for beauty. To see that power and that beauty together at the same time...it's really something.

What I would like to do is get a job dancing simply because I'm sick of going to school. I've been in school too long. I'll be twenty-four once I graduate. That is pretty late to start a career, but I have an advantage of being a male dancer, and I still have a certain amount of time left, especially if I take care of my body right.

Actually, I do have an easier chance of getting into a company. Males are needed and a lot of times guys will get into a company that have hardly any technique compared to what the women have. But I think directors understand that the level of the male dancer has to come up. The level of the male dancer technically has to be just as good as the female, so the men have to be competing with the women to catch up on that twelve or whatever years of technique that they've lost because most male dancers start late. But it really is expected that you have as good a technique. What I'd really like to do is get into a dance company and work my way up. I just want to dance, and I want to get paid for it. At this point right now I just want to get paid for it. I just have this weird thing that I want to get
paid for it. And I guess it's to prove my dad or my mom wrong that I can't make money. I don't know what it is. I'm just sick of being poor.
"Teaching dance is more than teaching steps. It's teaching people to take responsibility for their own talent and for integrating what I teach into their own personal style. When I go to a performance, I don't look at a dancer's feet unless he or she makes a mistake. I look at the whole person. There has to be someone present or it gets very boring. What I try to teach my students is: use your talent to share who you are."

--Frank Petri, jazz teacher
LOU ANN YOUNG

She teaches at Ball State University and at her own academy in Anderson, Indiana, where she is the director of her own company that is in its twentieth season, Anderson-Young Ballet Theater. She is also presently the director of Ball State Dance Theatre. She has been dancing since she was three.

I dearly love to dance. I love to teach. I really don’t care to exist without it. I’ve been trained in every form of dance. My favorite is ballet because it takes the most dedication, it takes the most correctness of technique. It’s the hardest form. I love the challenge, plus I love the line and the beauty of ballet. And not that other forms don’t have that same beauty about them. I like it, another reason too, basically it’s the oldest art form, and that’s where it all started, the classics and everything. I love the classics. I’m going to be a person that for as long as I live, I will try to see that these are preserved as well as all the contemporary works that are available now.

I worked with Jordan Ballet Theater for a long time which eventually became Butler Ballet, and then I danced with different little groups that would be around. When I was growing up, there were only like two, three big companies in the whole country—San Francisco, American Ballet Theatre, and New York City Ballet, and New York City was really in its infancy, so at that time you didn’t get on a plane and fly to New York and do all those kind of things. The advantages were not really there. I didn’t really have that advantage like some people did.

I’ve had lots of inspiring teachers, but the teacher that I really set my whole life on is Margaret Saul. And Margaret Saul was a Cecchetti teacher from England that I studied with for like twenty-five years that I dearly loved. In fact, I studied with her on Thursday and she went to the hospital on Saturday and passed away the following Saturday. She taught up until she was eighty-five years old. But her
teaching was what laid really the whole format for my teaching. Because through her I was trained so well that that was what I wanted to give back.

I try to prepare my students to know what it's like out there. I try to prepare them with the best technique they can install in their bodies. I try to install in them musicality. I try to prepare them for auditions. I try to prepare them for being turned down, for the pitfalls that are out there in the world, but they're not just there in the dance world, they're there in anything we go to look for. The dance world at the present time is having very hard times because they've cut back practically all the funding, and that's been cut back for the last eight years or more. A lot of companies have folded. When I was growing up there were just main big companies. Now there are regional companies all over the United States, and they pay dancers. Now, they don't pay everybody in the ensemble and all that, but they do pay nearly all of them, a certain percentage of dancers. And so there's a lot bigger realm to go to, but also a lot of those companies have had to close because local funding is no longer available, and they can't make it without that. Because no matter how hard we try, not every dance performance fills the auditorium, and especially here in the Midwest. I don't feel like we've been trained well enough to understand the arts. They're not really emphasized in our school systems like they are in New York and the East coast and the West coast. They're not. Let's face it. Anything that gets cut in any academic school is the arts. And the art of dance—we've been trying to get that into school systems for how many years? We've been trying to get certification for dance teachers so we don't have these little fly by night places that are out here opened up training kids and ruining their bodies and their feet and everything which is going to be an injury to them the rest of their lives. And we're still finding that. We're going to be fighting this probably most of my life too. Which is sad. Very sad. That's the reason we're trying so hard within our
department here to try and come up with a certification for all the dancers that won’t make it out there in the professional world. At least maybe to be able to go into the teaching world and have a valid certification.

Why did I decide to have my own company? Anderson-Young Ballet Theater at first was called Young Ballet Theater Troupe. It started out with eleven dancers and the reason the company was started was because I had all these very good students in ballet and they wanted to learn more about the classics. They wanted to learn more about dance. They wanted to perform more. And so the company was started in ’75—that was our first season, and the first thing we did was “Les Sylphides.” And then we did “Coppelia,” and just part of the dances from the “Nutcracker Suite” that first season. From that it’s developed into a scholarship gala that we now offer. We have a big “Taste of the Ballet” arts dinner where we perform. It’s a big money maker in the city. We now have the community schools coming to at least one or two performances a year. It’s grown a long, long time. Of course we had to go through our non-for-profit status and all of that, and once you do that, in ’85 we were asked to evaluate for the regional system. Usually when you evaluate you have to be asked first. Then you have to go through an evaluation, and they evaluate your director, your teaching, your classes, the company technique, they have to present three or four numbers in performance. And you’re evaluated by all the directors in the Mid-States (region), and when we were evaluated, we were evaluated by two of the national people too. And you’re either turned down totally and can try again, or you become an intern company and you can try and become a performing company and re-evaluate in a year. Or you become a performing company. We went right in as a performing company. Then every year we’re adjudicated. Every year. We’re adjudicated as to my teaching, their technique in class, and then we present choreographed pieces. And then the adjudicator is a
national adjudicator and they look at all the numbers presented to them throughout the Mid-States, and from those they choose an emerging choreographer program, a concert program, and a gala program, and they're presented on different nights at the festival each year. We have been very fortunate. We have won three Monticello choreographic awards; we have performed on the gala so many times that we are considered an honor company, which is the highest level you can reach. Always, always we've performed on usually all three nights. Last year we did a combined festival with Northeast Region as well as Mid-States, and we still performed on two nights. Some companies didn't perform at all.

My biggest thing is that I wish we could become a professional company. I wish there was enough money that the dancers could be paid. And I just think a lot of them are at the level that that's where they really should be, but funding is not there, you know. We do a lot more than a lot of other companies. We give big scholarships and things like that. You realize Anderson is one of the smallest cities that has a regional company.

I think because I love to dance, I was always more or less trying to figure out my own little things, and I choreograph a lot through music. A lot of people choreograph just through movement, they don't have to have music. One time I was driving to Pennsylvania, and I was up in the mountains, and this music came on, and I just became so enchanted with it that I knew I just had to choreograph something to it. And I pulled off the road so I made sure I got it all written down, what the music was because I was so enchanted with it. I'm that way when I teach. If a musician that I'm using is really inspiring, well then it's very inspiring to me. But that plus wanting to keep the classics going and restate them...I nearly always change the choreography some when I redo a piece except for the set things which have been handed down, and then I restate those and adapt them to the dancer.
I have no desire to ever quit. I hope to be just like my ballet teacher was—teach up until I drop and then go on to another world.
PETER BADEJO

He is a dancer, teacher, and choreographer. Originally from Nigeria, he now has a troupe based in England. Currently he is touring with WOMAD (World of Music, Arts and Dance), conducting workshops on Nigerian dance. He is lighthearted and enthusiastic.

I haven’t been dancing for too long. I started about twenty-six years ago. I’m forty-six.

In my culture dancing is an integral part of everyday existence, so I started dancing when I was young, and then when I went to school, I decided to take dancing professionally, even though the word professional means two different things. It means the Nigerian concept of dance and the concept of dance in the West Here professionalism means full-fledged commercialization. In that sense, they may not be the same in Nigeria, but professionalism may be the same in the sense of competence in a profession.

I’m a choreographer, and a teacher, and a dancer. I have had my own troupe for about nine years in Nigeria and now I’m based in England. I have a company in England. Folk dancing company. It’s not too large. Three is a crowd in the West...it’s a company of about nine. We do a little bit of touring. In fact, I just came back with a production that went to India, Spain, and Nigeria.

The purpose of my company, first and foremost, is to place African dance, specifically Nigerian dance, in its proper position. There’s always a tendency for non-Western dance to be put into the category of what they call folk dance, thereby negating it and cutting off its creative and its contemporary aspects.

I have been involved in WOMAD for about three years now. And the interesting thing about WOMAD is World of Music, Art, and Dance, and WOMAD is performance oriented, and I am interested in workshop processes that leaves a
more lasting image of WOMAD in the mind of the people. That’s why I’m involved in WOMAD. I run Nigerian dance workshops, and you just saw a glimpse of it. The response varies from place to place. There are some places we’ve been to, we’ve been to Saratoga, we’ve been to Albany, we’ve been to Pittsburgh in America, and we’ve been to Columbus. In some places people are more of spectators than participants, but in a place like Chicago, for instance, people are so enthusiastic. And they don’t have to necessarily dance, but they are ready to go with it, and they are very interested.

I think dance, as a universal means of communication, should be recognized and recognized in the sense that all dances of the world have their own meaning. It’s like some people say, “Oh, there are some human beings who don’t have rhythm.” I don’t believe that. Everyone has got rhythm. People just use it differently. And as such, I think all dancers should be recognized. And I hope one day, besides commercializing dance, we’ll be able to use dance in its functional roots within traditional communities.
YAAKOV EDEN

He is a teacher of folk and social dance and is also the director of the Eden Folk Review, a community folk troupe located in Muncie, Indiana.

I started dancing in the Youth Movement in Israel. In the Israel Youth Movement, children go to...it's like the Scouts, but it's a different direction in study about the history of the country and the culture, and they also have dance, and one of the activities that was also in the Youth Movement was folk dance, which I liked very much. It was so great, so that was one of the inspirations I had to start dancing. When I was in the fourth grade we had a play, and one of the eighth graders came in to arrange the dancing for us, and they picked 1 2 3 4 5 girls and 1 2 3 4 5 boys, and I happened to be one of the five, and I liked it. And combining that experience with the Youth Movement, I just got involved in it.

I came to the U.S. to study. I actually came to study math and physics at the University of Oregon, and I didn't care for it that much, and they had a good dance department and in a few weeks I got acquainted with them, and I ended up being a choreographer for them. So I changed majors and had that experience which I quit after about two years.

I danced in Israel with the national Kibbutz troupe Lahakat Hachativa and then I danced with Students of Haifa, which was a professional group. And then I came to the States in '68 or '69, I danced with the professional called the Tel Aviv Review. We did Israeli, Greek, and Russian-Ukrainian dances. That's my professional work.

It was demanding. We traveled a lot. In the folk review we had many smaller engagements, but once in a while we went to--I remember we had a three week tour to South America, a three week tour to Puerto Rico. And then we went
to New England. Now when I say South America and Puerto Rico, we were in one place which was nice. We had engagements like four weeks in Westgrave Music Fair in Connecticut. Those were longer engagements which were nice because we stayed in one house. At one point we had a six month engagement in a night club in New York. But otherwise we had dates for tours which consisted of dates like on the road all the time, so it was concert, pack, next night, the next day, on the road, next town, and so on. It would go for months, and it’s tiring. Enjoyable, but tiring.

When I finished, I was looking at two positions that required, or needed, someone to work with ethnic dance performance, and Stanford University was after me, they wanted me to come, and then Ball State also had an opening, but they just started, and I decided to...came here in, and I decided to take that because it was something to start from scratch, something I could put my stamp on it rather than have to work under someone who might have their own style, and I would have to wait until she retires, and you know how that goes. Sometimes someone says they’ll retire, and it’ll be six years before they really retire.

I love to teach. My last group dancing professionally I was on tour in South America. And the talent agent offered to triple my salary to start a group of my own and to travel with him, he’ll arrange the shows. And I was about one year away from finishing school, I took off for a while to dance professionally. Then I realized I don’t want to do it. I had always performed. If I go back to school and work with a group, and something said in me, “If I perform, somebody will enjoy it, they’ll remember it for a week, for a month, six months, maybe a year, but if if I teach, it’s a lesson that will stay with that person for life.”

I’ve never taken methods classes. I’ve never taken methodology, even though I teach the class. Because I just never took it. And it came easy, natural, and I just love to see the results when I teach someone a step and what they do with it
and what they look like afterwards, so there was no contest between either dancing professionally or going back to teaching, but you age. How long can you keep dancing professionally? Somebody comes along younger and better looking than you, less wrinkles, and jumps two feet higher than you, and your job is gone. But teaching is a security. But I really did it because I like it, because I had some offers which were good. When I danced with the professional dance company, I got paid twice the salary I had here. But I still like to teach best.

I tell my students to just relax and not worry about the steps because eventually they'll get it. Some might get a step the first time they try to learn it, some might get it a week later, or three, all depends on the individual ability, but eventually, this folk dance is done by people, they'll eventually get it, just relax into it, and it just works. Not to worry about the steps, because the steps have nothing to do with the dancing, it's the feeling that has to do with the dancing. If you relax, the body will follow. If you tense up, you can't move because tension is contrary to movement. So I just try to share how much I enjoy it, hopefully it works.

There are actually three types of folk dancing. Recreational is when the group purely does the dances in the format that they have been done. Demonstration would be to take that recreational dance form and just practice and make sure that everyone looks alike. So that when they would do a circle dance, they would do it in circles and so on. Performance, now you get into styling and you arrange it. Now the arrangements would be different than the dances as they were done originally in its ethnic background, but you are now in the performing arts, so you need to open up to the audience. There's a dimension you have to perform to.

Why do I like it? I like it because it's a dance form which really represents to the movement what a people is all about. Because folk dance is a typical expression of faith. The people of their everyday life. The importance I think comes in when
you perform, it's important to do it correctly so you will not, so the people who watch it will not have mixed conceptions about the nationality they see. The importance on the actual performing the way you perform it, rather than...

There is a difference between folk and ethnic. Folk dance means dances done by the people for recreational purposes. Ethnic usually has to do with ceremonial dances done by a group of people which are not done just whenever people feel like getting together and doing it. Ethnic does stand more for ceremonies, certain steps that have certain ceremonies and even certain rituals that are associated with ethnic as compared to folk. Like if you have a war dance, it will be done only before people go to war and it will be a certain dance done by certain people. A wedding dance is to be done only at a wedding like the Yemenite wedding dance was to be done only during the wedding which takes eight days. There are certain steps which done by the bride, done by the groom, done by the uncles, the aunts, the father, the men, the women, and nobody else does it unless they are positive who. That's not folk dance anymore. That is ethnic. So it has to do with the certain occasion.

How popular is folk dance? Well, it was very very popular until about ten years ago. Then it started to decline. There was probably a folk dance group in every university in the country and many cities and towns. It started to decline about ten years ago when the economy changed and the first thing that most schools did was cut into the arts and extra-curricular activities. And that's when it started to suffer. So I would say right now a lot of universities have lost their groups, but a lot of communities kept going on with it. It used to be until about ten years ago where square dance and folk dance were just about equal in popularity and membership and so on. Now we say that less and less. And I base that on the number of camps and workshops that are being offered the whole time. They are a little less. And then specialty. Suddenly something happened. It used to be international folk
dance. Now, suddenly about ten years ago they started to specialize. Suddenly you had more groups would meet and do only a given nationally like just Polish, just Hungarian, just Israeli. It cut into the international groups. So there might be just as many people dancing it, but not international, but a national.

I started my own international dance group called the Eden Folk Review. My purpose there is to have a group that does present international folk dances so it is available for people to see because to me one important thing about spreading the beauty of international cultures is to be able to show it. It's easier to show it than to have people travel to the countries. My purpose behind having my own group is twofold. One, it's not affiliated with the university, which is supported for what it really should be, it's political. Secondly, it's a community group and hopefully with time I'll be able to get a board of directors and apply for grants and have it self-sufficient, a non-for-profit organization because it is expensive. It's probably the most expensive dance form to present because of the costumes involved. In modern dance I can put anything I want, in ballet I put on some tutus and I can do many different ballets. In folk I have to have the costume for each nationality and it becomes very expensive. Not at all times will I make a costume which is really true to the region because I can't afford it. So I will make a costume which is true to the nationality. Just about every nationality, besides having different regional costumes, also has what is called a national costume in which the country is known for. I will usually try to make that costume and that way I am free to do dances from different regions, especially because of the cost. Like in Polish, if I use the Krakoviak step, the Krakow costume is the national costume. In Romanian, if I were to do a Transylvanian costume, I'm in trouble because that is only the shepherds. But if I do the typical Romanian costume, the national, then I can also do the Transylvanian dances.
I dance with my group as much as needed. The age factor doesn’t bother me there. If I can do it I’ll do it, If I can’t, I won’t do it.
SARAH MANGELSDORF

She is the coordinator of the dance program at Ball State University. She oversees the curriculum, makes sure who is teaching what, and that all choreography projects get completed. She also teaches modern dance, dance history, and choreography.

I was two and a half when I started dancing. I guess I had this vision that I was in dancing school, so my parents found a place, and they said as long as I was potty trained and I was two and a half, they would take me. I remember a little bit—I stayed with this one woman for about three to four years, and I remember some things from that time period. Then I changed to another school of dance which was studying ballet, acro, and tap and basic movement skills mostly. Then when I was around ten, eleven, I was always late because I went to private schools, and we got out later than the public schools, so the classes were always starting before I could get there. I got a little tired of being yelled at all the time because I was late, even though they knew why. So I said that I really didn’t want to do that anymore, and I wanted to ice skate.

So my parents were nice enough to try and find a place that taught ice skating. And it was a small, private rink, and the young man who was our teacher at first had been an Olympic skater, I don’t remember his name now. I stayed with that for about two, two and a half years, and then I got very involved in sports, so I played a lot of sports, mainly things that ran—soccer, I played some softball, it was not my favorite sport, but I love volleyball and I played basketball, and I ran track. So I did that.

Then when I was in high school, still playing sports, our teachers often taught dance and they came up with modern dance which I had never really heard of except for that I’ve always been choreographing and doing different kinds of movement, so they formed a modern dance club, and the teacher talked to me about
it, and I thought this was really nice, this satisfied what I wanted to do with
movement. And so I went to college, not thinking of dance as a possibility for a
major.

At the University of Arkansas I discovered Eleanor King. She had been a
member of the early modern dance movement, especially in the 30's. I started
taking classes with her as well as through the P.E. department and decided to change
my major to dance. I did that and took workshops in the summertime and things
like that. I was lucky enough when I graduated to get a job teaching at a small
college in western Kansas and stayed there for three years and everyone said if I stay
in education I would need a Master's degree, so I started working at it and after three
years I went back to Texas Women's University and got my Master's. I came here to
Ball State after two years there.

The closest I probably came to dancing professionally was when we were in
graduate school. The first year we went on tour for a month. We covered five
states, and we spent the first ten days down in the valley of Texas and then came
home overnight, did our laundry, and took off again. So we were gone for a solid
month traveling. It was a company that met three days a week from three to five
and then Monday through Thursday six to ten, Saturday mornings and Sunday
afternoons. So it gives you a good idea what rehearsals and what a professional life
would be. But I really had no interest in doing that. There were certain people I
would like to have gone to study with and would have done anything if I could
have, but they weren't teaching in various places, they would just hit different
schools or different productions.

Modern dance basically started somewhat at the turn of the century. It was a
revolt against the standards at that time, and basically it started in the United States
and Germany. There are lots of people who will say, "Well, the modern movement
started other places.” The change is a revolution for all kinds of things in the world. And this one in the United States, we had very poor dance at the turn of the century and the early part of this century. We saw bad ballet, you didn’t see other concert forms of dance, and many of the American artists decided they wanted to dance to say something, they wanted to be able to do different kinds of movement. They didn’t want to be entertainment for one set group of people. They wanted to try and communicate to the world and to make a statement as other artists do with their work. And so for them it started to go back to, “Let’s go back to the earth, let’s go back to what is natural. How do we use these movements?”

We often talk about Isadora Duncan as being the founder of modern dance. To some extent she is, she was one of the first real spirits. She really moved things much like a child, going back to that child-like wonder. She wasn’t childish, but very free movement, they’re very simple movements. In this country we had Denishawn which was highly theatrical, so it was really their students, who included Charles Weidman, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, who gave modern dance more a feeling of what we know it today. And then Mary Wigman and Hanya Holm coming from Germany. We had people like Isadora doing this free movement and going, “Hey, wait a minute. There’s more to life than five positions and pretty fancy costumes.” (costumes were still rather pretty) The Russians being a ballet company, but you had people like Nijinsky who spent a lot of time with his dances that created quite a controversy doing turned in footwork, no pointe work, so it was changing ballet in that way. Bright colors instead of very soft delicates.

It was a way too of bringing men back into dance. The Romantic period, and somewhat the Classical, even though the Classical used men well, the Romantic period almost made men superfluous in the ballet world, and that was the only concert form we had existing in the western world. So there was a need for change
and revolt against the status quo, new ideas, "Let's change this, let's go," and the modern happened to be at that point as well.

People in modern dance also started going internally in psychology. We have Freud and Jung and a number of others with all the psychology, and the moderns also took those concepts of going back into your body and the emotions you have and what you want to express and how your movement does that. It was a way of exaggerating the movement or pulling out real movement. They weren't afraid of showing things people didn't want to see.

Martha Graham is very noted for doing dances that are highly emotional. Her concerts, the old concerts were very very draining. And it often shows sides of us we don't want to see. So it's not always happy entertainment. It is thought provoked, and that to me in many ways is what the modern element really wanted to do is to make you think. It could make you laugh, it could make you cry, but it mainly wanted you to think and to see things from a different perspective. It also wanted to move into an art form or a separate art form where dance was the dominant force, not music dominating dance or the scenery dominating the dance, but the dance could stand on its own. And since there was no money, many of the moderns had no set work, and they were fortunate enough to find a lot of composers who wanted to work with them, so there was new music. It wasn't already pre-composed; they could work with the composers to develop ideas.

I think one man that highly influenced me was probably Charles Weidman. Most of my teachers had come from studying with Charles Weidman and knew him, so when I got to study with him, that was quite thrilling. But a few years later, a man by the name of Jack Cole who is really better known as the father of jazz dancing, but he had been a modern dancer. He did mostly nightclub work and film work as well as Broadway. There was just something wonderful about that man.
He was very unpredictable, but he was extremely kind to me. He looked like a lion tamer when he talked—all he needed was a whip. But his words were almost like whips. But he just demanded so that you wanted to do a lot more for him.

Then probably ten, twelve years ago, I discovered a man by the name of Bill Evans. I really like Bill’s approach to movement, so he’s had a stronger influence on my life in the last ten years. Mainly it gave me a joy back in moving, and it also showed that as you get older, you can rediscover that joy and you can redefine the efficiency in your body so that it becomes pleasurable again. That movement has a reason, and it’s quite thrilling. Bill does all forms of dance: he taps, he’s done ballet—he was a professional ballet dancer for a number of years—, then modern. It’s also an intellectual pursuit working with Bill and the way he choreographs, the way that he teaches class, the way that he develops combinations, and the way you start to understand how to achieve the movements you want in your body, so he’s probably been the strongest influence later.

There’s a friend of mine, Jim Neirinck, who happened to be a student at Ball State, but before I was ever here. Jim used to come back and teach classes, and there was a joy about moving with Jim. And for me, Jim started my rediscovery why I was really in dance, and Bill kind of found the whole garden of it. You know, you start out with the seed, and all of a sudden it blossoms and the whole fulfillment of it, and I was able to go on better. And it’s interesting that I found men more inspirational than some women as teachers, but it could just be the way it worked out for me.

I loved Eleanor King. She was my teacher in college, and she was quite a fascinating woman, and I think I learned a lot about not only dance, but a lot about life. She was eighty-two, eighty-three probably when she died, which was only about two years ago. The last time I had seen her she was seventy-six and she was here
visiting the campus, and spending four days with her was quite a thrill for me. The woman had just been to Egypt, to New York, still extremely active, still very bright an vital, very curious about things, so it reminded me of when I was in college that she would throw her body into movement much more than we would, and we were younger, and we should have had no fear, but we all put a little restriction on it, and I would watch her throw herself and think, “My gosh, this woman is crazy and wild!” And then I realized a few years later, “Wait a minute, you have to be that way. You have to learn to let go on stage. You have to know something and go with it.” So she was probably another strong influence.

I decided to teach at the college level mainly because I could teach what I wanted to teach. When I got out of school, which was in the late sixties, many of the high schools did not have dance programs, especially in the way they have them now. Since I minored in physical education, when I would interview people for jobs, and I said, “Well, I’m really a dance major.” “What’s dance?” And I was also in a lot of Bible Belt areas and they didn’t allow dancing. So college for me was the nice outlet. It also worked out when I did my student teaching, I found out I really liked teaching. I wasn’t especially fond of junior high students mainly because they didn’t want to hear what I wanted to tell them because they weren’t ready for it. So I was most fortunate when I graduated that this small college called and said they needed a dance teacher and they accepted me, because not many places hire people with only a Bachelor’s. But it didn’t really have a dance major, it had a program. I had a company and I taught classes. I also taught some P.E. classes. But it gave me a really good experience saying this is where I really need to be, and that’s one of the reasons I went back to graduate school.

The difference in education is that there’s a turnover, and you have to accept those cycles. You have students for four years, maybe, three years, and so about
every three to four years you have sort of a complete turnover. Sometimes it can linger a little longer, but it's like starting over again. And you go, "Oh, how many times can you say the same thing?" and "Why don't they know this?" So once you accept that the cycle is going to be there, then you start to work with it and not fight it as much.

My happiest time, and it still is to some extent, is in rehearsal. I love rehearsal. I love the process. And many young people because they are young, or just their personalities, want the product, and the product is sort of the icing on the cake for me. It's nice to have it, but I don't have to have it. I love the process of developing something and then once it's finished, really learning it. When I had that problem of wondering whether I should be doing this, I started thinking about it and realizing no matter what, it's a process.

I like to tell my students to think about dance as more than just physical. I like analyzing movement. Many students just want to do movement. I believe that it has to make them happy. It might be painful, but it has to satisfy them. One of the reasons I like dance more than other areas was because it forced me to learn about other areas. I had to read literature so I understood some of the background of various dances. I had to look at paintings and sculpture. I had to look at architecture. I had to listen to a lot of music and start to learn more. You talk about science keeping you involved in other areas. So to me it's showing a way that dance can be a part of their life in all aspects of it. So I try and give a little bit of that to the students and why I'm still happy dancing after all these years, and if they can find that, then they will. The other thing is that you want them to be as good as they can be. We have a lot of students who don't have high skills. It's getting so that more of our general students are there rather than our majors and minors as much. But you just want a student to learn to be patient with themselves and to consistently keep
learning. If you can keep that patience going and make it so. Dancing is not something that comes quickly. It's a lot of pain and a lot of hard work and a lot of discipline. If it's in a technique class, it's one thing. When I teach dance history, I would like for people to learn that dancing is not just what this generation is used to is what's on the TV, the real hip-hop stuff, that there is more to dance. That they can look and see where it came from but also look at design and what makes it satisfying or unsatisfying to them.

Sure, I sometimes wonder why I am dancing, and why am I teaching. And teaching a form that the majority of students I teach have never really seen before they get here. Sure. And yet I remember years that were good, and I'll watch something and go, "Wait a minute, no, I have to go back to it." Or I'll read something or read about someone, and sometimes it has to do with dance, sometimes it has nothing to do with dance, but just the idea of, "You've chosen something, it makes you happy. Rediscover why it makes you happy." I think everybody can do several things in their life, but there is probably some career that is most satisfying. I did discover that it wasn't me that was really worn out, it was sometimes the students not responding in the way that you want them to.

In any good dance, the movements develop out of what you're trying to say or how you're trying to work. And that one movement leads into the next movement whether it stops or starts but there is a reason and it continues to develop and take you some place. Because there are dances that tell stories, there are dances that are just about rhythm, there are dances that are lovely and pretty, but a well constructed dance—all the movement relates to the motif and develops out of that motif. For me dance has to be more three-dimensional. I like to see dance fill up a space or use a space. I get very tired of very lateral movement which we see a lot of, not because people want it, but because of the way the space is they give us
where people have to perform. Or you have, "Here are sixty people. Make them move." Well, it's very difficult to make them move without running into each other, so you teach and you do things that are very lateral and somewhat two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional and finding the four corners. To me choreography, it has to say something to the audience and it has to be truthful and it has to be honest. It can't try and hide things.

You get ideas for a piece from anywhere and everywhere. As a choreographer you hope you stay observant. It can be anything. It can be reading a book, it can be looking at something, it can be looking at a design, it be watching one person walk, it can be something that happens in the news, colors...it just comes from anywhere. Most people deal with, because we are humans, we deal with the human condition, so it is always some aspect of the human condition. It's not always relationships or love relationships, but it has to do with something about the human being, whether it's the rhythms that are inside us, since all of our organs, and that stuff and our blood pumps at a certain rhythm, and our emotions change those rhythms, or an injury changes those rhythms. You get ideas from all over. Sometimes music inspires me. I'll hear a piece of music and visions start coming immediately, and you know that you want to use that piece of music. Other times the idea for the dance comes first and you start to work it. The dance that I did last fall, which was an extension of the garden. The year before I did a garden that was somewhat a gentle and feeling of a Japanese garden. This still had a Japanese feeling, or an Oriental feeling, I should say, to it, and I will probably do another garden. The one this year didn't go where I planned. I planned a violent garden because I spent all summer killing slugs. All of a sudden, you know, every night going out and putting salt on these creatures and watching them die—it started to bother me as a very violent kind of existence than what was happening. But my dance didn't turn out
to be that. The next one I think might be, not about killing things, but just the violence that exists and the unusualness of the garden and where we’re looking at it. So my dancers weren’t really slugs, even though I joked about it being slugs, but the idea the slugs undulating movement because they’re just snails without shells in some ways, and the eating of things, and then it was just something underneath, they come at night or they come out of the ground. It was just that kind of thing. That seems like such a silly thing to start with, but one year I was horribly frustrated and so angry, and I started off doing a dance about frustration and it turned into a comedy. And many times when you look at somebody’s choreography, you can sometimes tell what’s happening in their lives. And if you follow certain choreographers, you can definitely tell. But many times it’s a total opposite reaction to where it started or it was something that happened ten years ago and all of a sudden it’s coming out now. So it really comes from anywhere and everywhere.

I like teaching. I like students, and I think that’s important. If you like students, then you can continue to teach. If you find you don’t like students or you’re bored with your subject matter or tired with it, then you need to get out. I don’t feel that way. I keep finding new things, and I keep finding students who are interesting. I think any teacher will say the hardest thing is to look out and see a sea of blank faces in a classroom because they don’t give as much back. And students sometimes tend to think of, “Well, just tell me stuff. Teach me.” Learning is a two-way street. If it would get too frustrating that way or I couldn’t teach what I wanted to teach. If I was told, “You can’t teach this,” and “You can’t teach that,” then I’d get out. But as long as I enjoy the students and enjoy my subject matter, I’ll stay in it.
THE PERFORMER

"...the key to a great performance is to kill ‘em from the word go. Make them love you from the first step."

--Stepp Stewart, choreographer, MCA recording artist

"...every performance is unique. You don’t focus on yourself, you give to others—because this moment will never happen again."

--Merrill Ashley, Principal, New York City Ballet
TOD ALLEN BAKER

He is a professional dancer, and he is also a member of Ball State Dance Theatre. He injured his back at dress rehearsal two days before the opening of their spring concert, in which he performed in several numbers. We talked three days after his injury.

During one of the leaps in "Cats" I just went up for a jump, and I had back spasms all that day, and when I went up for the jump, I just pulled all the muscles in my upper back and I just couldn’t move anymore. I went back on stage thinking I could finish it, and they said, "Tod, if you’re that badly hurt, then just go sit down." And that’s when I sat out. And when I pulled it and I was sitting down, I knew I was going to have to miss opening night. I mean, I already knew my injury was that bad I was going to have to miss. I think it’s the performer side of me that kept on saying, "Well, I’ll be all right. By Thursday I’ll get better, and I’ll be OK," but I knew I wasn’t going to be OK, but there was just that side of you, until you actually have to miss it, that thinks that you’re going to be OK, and I knew I wasn’t going to be all right.

I went to the emergency room, and they gave me a lot of pain killers and muscle relaxers to relax my back. Basically it’s too much stress on my back in the last couple of weeks like lifting weights or working out or some factor, and then coming here to rehearse. And it just got to be too much on my back. I knew I was having spasms, and they’d go away, but I didn’t think I would overwork my back that much. I hurt my lower back three years ago, and that was just from and that wasn’t when I was dancing. That was just from other stuff. I kind of felt it coming on, but I really didn’t think I’d be out.

Everyone knew in their heart I was with them out on stage, and I knew I was with them, but in my heart I felt separated because I was out there and I worked all year long, especially on "Tilted," I had worked all year on "Tilted," and I didn’t get to
do it. And "Cats" is the piece I wanted to be in too, and every piece I wanted to do, but those two are the ones I really strove for, and I couldn't do them. Yet it made me proud to watch all my friends out there doing a good job, and it made me proud to see my understudies and how fast they picked up. And that kind of made me proud to see those guys out there doing their job.

The doctor said I could perform in three days. I know if I didn't have to do lifts and everything, I'd probably be OK. I doubt I'll do "Cats" tonight because I don't know if I could do a whole show—I don't know if my back could stand it. But at least I'm doing some of the numbers, I'll be doing something. But it wasn't so much the performing, I just want to show I could do it. It's not something I have to prove because my back feels better enough that I could do it, but it's just the last number.

I kind of worried about my summer job because I'm working at Opryland, and it kind of threw me and I thought, "Oh, what if this happens." That's all I could think of when I was on the floor when it first happened was, "Oh, God, I hope this doesn't happen all summer." But I'm going to start working my back to get my upper back more built and not exhausted as much. I couldn't really tell you what did it because my upper back never really did this. It just gave out. It's something that happens. I just overworked it. But I don't think...once you have a back injury, it's always going to be reoccurring, but you just got to know your limit, when to stop. And this one just came on all of a sudden. I didn't know it was as bad as it was, but now that I'm aware of it, I can take care of it.
Catherine Sparks

She is an apprentice and the assistant costume designer with Dance Kaleidoscope, the only professional modern company in Indianapolis. She teaches ballet and pointe at the Anderson-Young Ballet Theatre in Anderson, Indiana, where she is also the assistant artistic director. "And anything else I can fit in inbetween."

"When I tell people I'm a dancer, the first thing that most people think of is 'stripper.' I don't know why. They think "dancer," and they automatically assume 'stripper' kind of dancer. And I think it's because of my age and my height and--I'm not going to say that I'm good looking--but for some strange reason...and it's like, 'No! No! No! Ballet, modern, jazz, that kind of stuff.' And they're like, 'Oh.' They're so disappointed."

She is twenty-four years old.

I'm 5'8". No, it doesn't help me. Unfortunately. It's great to have really long legs and it looks beautiful on stage, but most male dancers are very short which makes dancing very hard. You can't dance next to a male that's shorter than you. In college I always got stuck with whoever was the tallest. I couldn't dance with who I could dance well with because of the height. It had to look good on stage. And the smaller dancers always get, not necessarily the better parts, but the more difficult because of size. Size usually deals with quickness. The smaller you are, the quicker you are. The longer you are, the harder it is to get off the floor, the harder it is to--I mean, it looks beautifully wonderful and long and elegant and smooth, but as for quickness, I think quickness is my downfall because of how long my muscles are. The ideal height would probably be around somewhere between 5'3" and 5'5", 5'6" because it's an average height for men, especially. We're not talking six foot guys--even six foot guys I have trouble dancing with because as soon as I go on releve, I'm taller than they are. What do you do? For the really short short dancers, they always get stereotyped into particular parts. You get the same thing when you're a really tall dancer. So if you've got that average good height, you've got it made.
I generally get up around eight, leave here by nine thirty so I can go and stretch out a little bit before class. Class starts at ten. Goes from ten until twelve, we get about a fifteen minute break then we go straight into rehearsal for whatever until two. Then we break for lunch at two. That's when I leave, go home, get something to eat, leave by three so I can get to Anderson by four because that's when I teach. I teach from four either until seven or nine, depending on the day. Then I come home and attempt to help with costumes (*laughing*) in any hours that are left. That's Monday through Thursday. On Fridays I don't have to go to Anderson, so I'm just with the company until two, and my Friday evenings are open. On Saturdays I teach up in Anderson from eleven until four and Sundays I don't have to do anything if I don't want to. So basically Sundays are my only real day off, and of course I choose to do costuming.

I started when I was about eight. I'm twenty-four now. Actually, I didn't really continue dance. It was just something other than school that I did. Every Wednesday for two hours I went to dance class, and that was something that I could do for myself. And I never performed, I never did anything. From grade school through high school I never did any performances at all. Then I got to college—"Why not take a few dance classes, it'll be fun." Then it was like, "Oh, why not audition for the dance company, it'll be fun." And then I performed and it was just—it's like all of a sudden a big boulder smacked me across the head and said, "No, this is really what you want to do." So I just went with that. I was an art major and a dance minor, and my junior year I flip-flopped them and became a dance major and an art minor because I was spending more time dancing than I was on my assignments for my art classes, so I decided I'm spending more artistic energy doing my dancing instead of my artwork.

I really adore and love ballet, but me and pointe shoes just don't get along
very well because it hurts! *(laughing)* It’s painful! And it’s also very psychosomatic. I mean, knowing that you are three inches higher off the ground and that your balance in pointe is that much smaller psychs a person out so bad it’s just like, “agagaga,” and trying to balance and trying to do things correctly it takes a lot of, not necessarily physical strength, but mental strength of knowing that you can do this, and only until recently have I felt comfortable doing pointe work. I’ve been in pointe shoes since twelve, so that’s a long time. I knew that I wasn’t going to be a ballerina. I mean, if I could dance without my pointe shoes, I would. If I could do ballet without pointe shoes, I would do it, and I would do it willingly.

The nice thing about modern, and that’s what I’m doing now, is that it still has all the ballet technique. We take ballet class for an hour every single day. Even though it’s a modern company, we still take ballet class and then we do a modern center. And it’s still...you still need that ballet technique, that base to work from, and it still takes a lot of strength. It’s just that with ballet it’s all very uplifting and the modern is contractions and down and earthy.

This is my second year with Dance Kaleidoscope. I came home from college, and the typical friend of a friend said, “You’ve got to meet the Sparks family. You’ve got to meet Cathy because she’s this wonderful seamstress and so is her mother and they sew all the time.” The costume designer had only been there a year, and he desperately needed volunteer work. So I was like, “Sure, anything.” And he said, “We can’t pay you, but you can take the dance classes for free. You can dance with the company for free.” And after being there for six months, that’s when the director asked me to be an apprentice with the company. Basically I just take class with the company and the artistic director of Dance Kaleidoscope every so often uses the apprentices in his pieces. The company has four female dancers, four male dancers, and then the two apprentices. It’s just the eight dancers. That’s all they
have money for. If he could expand that company, he would immediately, I'm sure. But he's only been in the city for two, going on three years, and changing the mentality of the board that works for them, trying to get them to do more, like get them more tours and going more places. This company the way it is right now could easily be performing in Chicago, in New York, in Seattle, in all the big places. They could easily be performing there. But nobody knows we exist because for nineteen years it was the same thing. The directors that were there for nineteen years were very happy with just doing Indianapolis, and now the director has higher hopes for his company, and it'll get to the point where he wants it, which is doing more tours, having a bigger name, getting to the point where it could be a larger company, and also getting to the point where it's a school for Dance Kaleidoscope. It'll get bigger one of these days.

We perform four times a year. We've got your fall, winter, spring, and early summer shows, and any other little tidbit shows at the malls or anywhere else we can get. Our audiences are getting a lot better. Dance Kaleidoscope, when it originated, the reason they gave it that name was because they tried to do every aspect of dance: the modern, the jazz, the ballet. Now that the new director has come in, he's strictly Martha Graham background, and he wants to develop this into a very strong modern company, and at first everyone was like, "Oh, well, the old artistic directors are gone. It's not going to be the same, and we don't know if we like it or not." But he is definitely proving himself through--the Indianapolis audiences are responding very well. I have heard more often, "I really enjoy watching Dance Kaleidoscope," instead of, "Oh, it was OK." I've been in this city long enough, and that's always what I've heard was, "Yeah, I enjoyed certain things, but most of it was typical, normal." Our director is definitely not typical or normal.

I'm pushing myself because I didn't realize what I wanted until I was twenty,
twenty-one. Logically, I should have been dancing professionally already. So it's already taken me more time, and of course my mom's going, "Now, how long do you think you're actually, once you get into a professional company, how long do you actually think you're going to be dancing?" And I'm like, "It doesn't matter. If I don't do it and I don't find out now, then I'll be doubting myself the rest of my life." And she's like, "OK! Good answer!" And I was like, "Thank you," because there is logic behind it.

The other apprentice from Dance Kaleidoscope is still in high school. I look at her and go, "If I had that much drive and potential of knowing what I wanted when I was fifteen years old, I would be so amazed where I am right now."

*Do you ever regret that?*

Oh yeah, definitely. Definitely. Life, family, and everything was very easy. I was always very happy and self-satisfied with what I could do and passing. Just passing. That's all I was happy about. If I got a "C", I was happy because it was passing, and that's all I really cared about. And the things I did really well were the things that...because I was always good in art and always got "A's" in art, so it's like, "OK, I'll just go into an art field." And when it came to dance, because I was in my teacher's basement and I didn't have any performing time, I never knew what it was like, so I didn't know I could do it. My mother kept trying to push me into, "Do you want to go somewhere else for classes?" It was like, "No." I was just very self-satisfied in just going once a week and doing what I was doing. And I look back at it now, and it's like, "If I knew, if only I knew, I'd be in splits right now!"

I think that's the hardest thing, getting the body to do what it--it's like my muscles settled into twenty-four years old. They have definitely settled, and they're not happy with me deciding that they're trying to do something else. Splits are--they do not like me when I do my splits. They're like, "I don't think so!" "Sorry, I have
to do this. I just have to.”

This is what I want. This is what I want to do. And going to class, I mean, you wake up in the morning and it’s like, “I don’t want to get up, I don’t want to do this.” But something in your heart, not your head because your head thinks too much, something in your heart definitely drives you to do it, to go and to exert all this energy into something that you’re going to be on stage for three minutes. That’s worth it. Just the performance time is worth it.

I dance for the pure exhilaration of it, of being able to express myself in an art form that if you don’t experience it for that moment, it’s lost forever. So you really really have to hold onto it and grasp for every moment. It’s just like living. You can either live in your house and clean the house every day and never go out and never experience the world or you can go out, drive a hundred miles to a mountain and climb it. And for me, dance is like climbing that mountain. It’s like every step that you take, a rock will fall out from underneath you or it’s the--yeah. It’s the exhilaration that wonderful knowing that you’re living, feeling, and being able to express that to other people who can’t necessarily do that.

The self-doubt got me into costuming. Because I can sew. I enjoy sewing for myself. And when I graduated from college it was like, “Well, I’m going to give myself six months. If I don’t get into a professional company by then, it wasn’t meant to be, and I’ll do costuming instead. Because I can do costuming.” And “If I can’t do this, I’ve got something else to fall back on,” which was probably the biggest mistake I made because everyone has—it’s inbred between families. If you can’t do what you really want to do, have something to fall back on. And instead of telling children that, we should just say do what it takes to do what you want to do. You can’t have your feet in two places at the same time. You can’t be a servant to two masters, as they say. Because what you’re doing is like you’re giving fifty-fifty
percent of your energy instead of one hundred percent in one place. So I had recently decided that costuming wasn’t what I wanted to do. I didn’t want to go through the torture of the director saying one thing and then the dancers saying another thing and then having to change it five times before the costume actually was finished. Then all of a sudden someone had said something exactly what I just told you about: You’ve got to just put both feet in one place and concentrate and give all your energies to that one thing that you want. And all of a sudden it was like another boulder hit me across the head. But it was that confidence of knowing that I could do costuming and the lack of confidence of knowing I could make it as a dancer because it’s hard. Especially for females. If I was male, I would be dancing right now. I would be dancing in a professional company, no problem. (laughs) But I’m not. Guys were born and raised to do big football, manly man, dancing is for sissies imagery in their head. And actually, dancers in general are probably the most physically fit individuals, strongest in a completely different sense strongest, but a strong athlete. Very strong athlete. But they don’t get that because they look at it and say, “All male dancers are gay,” and the typical stereotypes. Male dancers are very limited, so when you can get a male dancer, you use them to their full potential and you hold on to them for dear life because if they’re gone it’s like, “Who’s going to be there to lift the women?” I do have one little boy (in my class). It’s funny about him because the mother has two daughters, and the two daughters weren’t interested at all, but the little boy, he’s just dying. He just loves going to class. He adores being there. It’s really really nice.

What do you like about teaching?

(Laughing) Torturing small children. Now I get to give it back to them! But with kids, it’s being able to give something that they will be able to go out and perform to give to other people. With the kids that you see potential in dance and
you see that they’re actually trying and physically wanting the same thing that you want. It’s very exciting to be able to share, to give that information that it takes to either become just a better dancer or to become professional. You can’t look at these kids and say, “Professional potential!” and force them into something that they probably won’t ever realize that they want until it’s too late or they’ve been working so hard that they can do it.

They average between age seven through eighteen. Depends. My ballet one and two are generally about the seven through about eleven. Twelve through about fourteen is the junior company, and then once they get into high school or when they are potentially ready to be in the company, that’s where they are. That’s how they break up the classes also.

You can sit there, and you can lecture them, and you can tell them, “You guys really got to do this. Why are you here? You want to dance, you have to do well in class; you have to do well at barre so you can do things well across the floor.” And all they want to do half the time is just run around and play. Which of course gets me mad, and all I do is sit and scream, which is a typical teacher thing to do—is to yell and scream at the students. I think they have to find that within themselves. I can give them all the encouraging words in the world, but if they can’t see it within themselves, then they just won’t try. They won’t do it. And there’s nothing I can do except hover over them and scream, saying, “Push! Turn out! Come on!” When I’m hovering over them, they really work, but as soon as I walk away, it’s like the typical children hanging on the barre, not paying attention, not doing the exercise.

My younger kids don’t know enough about ballet, which is hard. And the older kids think they know everything about ballet, so they don’t pay any attention to me, and it’s hard. But the ten, eleven, twelve-year-olds are finally—they’re comfortable enough with ballet that they’re finally working for the technique
instead of just doing the movement, and I get more positive reinforcement and encouragement with those kids than I do with anybody else because they're really trying, they're asking important questions about how to become good dancers. There is the positive side of it besides all the yelling and screaming.

Probably the best thing that I can do to encourage them to continue dancing is telling them when they're doing good and when something looks right and when something feels right, then all of a sudden something clicks, and it's like, "Oh yeah! OK! We get it now!" All I can do is really be a positive influence by encouraging them and saying they're doing good and, "All you have to do is try a little bit harder in this particular section," or, "What you have to do is do this, and you'll have it." And then they do it and they have it and that's like, "Oh yeah! OK, OK, OK," but that's also very technical, and to continue to dance is all within themselves.

You need every single bit of dance that you can possibly get to be a well rounded dancer. And the more well rounded you are, the more you're going to perform because the more knowledge you have of your own body and also of dance in general and how to perform.

Recently, I pulled my pelvis out, so the pelvic bone was out. It wasn't my back, it was the pelvic bone that was out. And that's because my body, with rehearsing and performing with Dance Kaleidoscope and getting proper technical classes, my body is changing, and because of the change in my body, if there's any tension whatsoever, it shifts, and I had an injury up in my upper shoulder where it was just tension, and since it's all one big long muscle down the spine, it just took my pelvis and just whacked it out of place. I really didn't know what happened. It just was there and all of a sudden I couldn't get my leg up. It was very painful, and it was shooting down the inside muscles and it was like, "Ooooww!" And I didn't know what happened until I went to an osteopath. I said, "My pelvis is out,
something’s out. My back’s out somewhere.” And he said, “No, it’s your pelvis. You didn’t need to come and see me for this. All you have to do is do the Thigh Master and put pressure between your knees and it’ll just pop right back into place. You could do that by yourself.” And I’m like, “All right! I don’t have to spend thousands and thousands of dollars to correct this!” Which is very nice because what it does is it holds the muscles, it pulls them this way (demonstrates with her hands) so that it automatically forces the bone back into the correct place when you do that. So I was real happy about that. But I have had continual problems with it just because of my body getting used to it being in a completely different position. I’ve got a slight scoliosis in my spine, both rotating out and rotating in a slight ‘s’, and with the more and more ballet that I’ve had, the more it is correcting itself, and the muscles have to adjust every time the correction is getting better and better, and all it is right now is that the muscles are weak in that particular area, and they just need to strengthen themselves because it’s a completely new position, completely new information that it’s getting.

Ballet teaches wonderfully great posture, so if it was somebody coming in who had scoliosis or she had a back problem or feet problem or something of that sort, dance is an excellent way of rehabilitation. I know that one of the students at Anderson-Young, if she wasn’t continuing to take ballet right now, her hips and her legs would be so turned in, she’d be very badly pigeon-toed where it would be painful for her to walk. But since she started ballet at such a young age, it corrected itself because she had to work on the turn-out and she had to use those muscles in a different way than she would have normally.

Eventually I would like to choreograph. But that’s something that I can do later. I think I need to have more of a dance vocabulary of different movements and knowing my own body before I can get into choreographing on other people’s
bodies. I could probably do ballet. I could do ballet. As for modern, I've only been studying modern for seven years. Same thing with jazz. I definitely could not--I have no funk. I am funkless. Jazz and me just do not get along. When I have to move my arms and--no. Me and jazz just don't get along. It was wonderful technique, and I needed it, but as for performing it, that's not good. That's not something I want to do now. Of course, unless I have to do it. Like when I'm teaching up in Anderson, I have to teach some kind of choreography for the show at the end of the year when all the little kids have to dance.

My sister says, "Well, you theater types are all alike. You sit there and complain about the houses that you live in and the rent you have to pay, but you don't go out and get real jobs." And it's like, "When do I have time?" In my day I don't have time to go and I can't get an eight hour job unless it's after rehearsal in the evening, which consists of waitresses and doing restaurant jobs because most places close at five or six or nine o'clock at night. It's like, "You just don't understand, do you?" She's got the perfect little job with her wonderful constant income, and I prefer knowing that I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. It keeps life more interesting not knowing whether I'm going to be dead broke tomorrow or what. But it also takes that kind of mentality to be in the profession that I am in. Because if I was under the idea that no, I need a lot of money to make myself happy, then I'd be doing secretarial work. But dance is what makes me happy. That's why I'm going to work and strive on that, focus on that, so I can do what I want and if it means being poor and barely getting by, then that's what it takes.

It's so expensive. For artists it costs so much to buy paint brushes and the paint and the canvases and all the things it takes to make the art that if they could actually take--paint brushes, really fine, good paint brushes are twenty dollars.
Somewhere between twenty to fifty dollars. And if they could take that money that
they spend on the art supplies and the things that make them who they are, they'd
be living perfectly fine. Me, I have to buy the leotards, the tights, and the dance
shoes and the hair supplies and the makeup. And if I didn't have to spend that
money, I'd be fine. But I mean, like pointe shoes. I could—if I was performing, I
would probably go through a pair every show, once a show, so if the show was going
the whole weekend, then you know, that's rehearsal time and the show. Most
professional ballerinas go through it in a night, so that's forty dollars down the
drain.

Forty dollars for a pair of shoes?

Those are the inexpensive ones. The most inexpensive ballet shoe is like
thirty-two dollars, and that's for a pointe shoe. They go all the way up into the
sixties, depending on the shoe.

And how do they wear out so quickly?

Proper use of the foot because of the muscles. The muscles wear down the
leather that—it's the shank, it's the piece that's going up and down the middle of
your foot that is supporting your foot up on pointe. And just working that leather—as
soon as you work the leather to the point where it's so soft that you can't stand on
them anymore, then you have to get a new pair. And it's—most kids can go through
pointe shoes within a year. But that's because they haven't developed the muscles
on their feet to properly go through and use the pointe shoe to what it should be.
Other kinds of shoes it just depends. I've got character shoes that I've had for seven
years, and they never tear down, unless of course the heal starts coming off, and
then you can get a little shank, a little crossbar to put in there and it doesn't matter.
Then you've got them for a couple more years. Unless you need a specific color.
That's the only time you start getting into trouble is when you need a specific color.
I've got a pair of black character shoes that I use for tap. Then I've got plain black character shoes because I can't take the taps off and on, depending on the performances. Then I've got a pair of the tan T-top character shoes. Then I've got character flats. Then I've got teacher shoes, and I've got pink ballet shoes, and I've got green ballet shoes. Then I've got two pairs of pointe shoes that I'm working on right now. And I've also got—all my shoes are in my bag. It just goes on and on.

There are so many different kinds of shoes. And everybody wants a different kind of shoe. That's where the trouble comes in. It's like "No, no, no, we all have to wear pink teacher shoes with the really small heel. I don't want character shoes."

And it's like, "Great, another pair of shoes." I think the worst is when you're in a company and having to get leotards and tights because those go (laughs) quickly. Your favorite one will last maybe about a year. That's the one you wear every week. Of course it gets frustrating, especially when rent comes due and you're like, "Where?! I had some money a second ago!" It gets really frustrating when you know that these people, the choreographers, could use shoes that everybody already has, but he chooses otherwise because, you know, it's the look of the dance.

(sarcastically) The importance of the look of the dance. So, it's very frustrating.

The arts are always suffering. They're always going to be hurting simply because—I don't know if it's a lack of appreciation, the general lack of appreciation because most people...it is so diverse and so strange for some people to even look at the arts. Especially modern, nowadays kind of art. They can look at the old Degas' and go to the art museum and look at all of the old stuff and just be in wonder of it. But as soon as they go into the section where it's modern art, it's like, "Yuck. A big dot on a black canvas. I can't understand it." And don't try to understand and don't try to open their minds to new things. People—they get bored, I guess, some people get bored and they don't think it's important enough to really pay attention, but in
actuality they're just totally missing out because their minds are closed to what is out there.
BILL EBBESMEYER

"I'm currently the listed choreographer and dance captain of the touring company of Man of La Mancha which will be traveling until the beginning of May when our contracts end, all over the United States and into Mexico and Canada. It's the first show with this company. This company is based out of New York, it's Jericho Productions, and it's in association with Niko and Associates, which has currently four, we're the fifth show that they have either on the road or playing on Broadway itself. We opened this show the beginning of September, so we've been doing it a little over a month, and we've played probably fifteen cities already or more. It's basically a bus and truck where we do one-nighters everywhere."

He is tall, thin, and very personable.

We actually sit up in the hotel for the night, and then we travel early in the morning and sleep on the bus then. That's what you're apt to do. It's a little bit draining because you don't have a feel like you can really warm up as well as you might want to before the show in the evening, but with doing this over and over, you kind of get to the point where you know exactly how much you have to warm up so you don't have to go through a whole barre or a full floor exercise just to warm yourself up. You know kind of what you're going for in each of the different things that you're doing. And I actually warm up internally in the show before a couple of final things in Act Two.

Basically, I started doing shows when I was six or seven. Well, six. And my dance instructor saw me in St. Louis doing a show and she had offered to give me dance lessons and my dad of course said, "My son's not going to dance." So I always kind of had it in the back of my mind that I wanted to be a dancer, and also a singer and an actor, and did all this stuff in high school, all of the shows in high school, and some stuff in grade school with like speech debate tournaments and stuff like that. Mom was real supportive of it, and dad just kind of said, "Yeah, it's OK," and didn't really bother too much about it.

I went to college fully intending to be like this pre-law degree, as everyone
goes to be pre-law when they don’t know what they’re going to do. And the second week we were in college, they had an audition for the talent show. And the same auditions were also being held for the first two shows, so I thought, “What the heck, I’ll do it.” Just as kind of a whim. Wound up getting a secondary lead in the first show, which was the musical, and wound up getting a minor role in the second show. Got to be very good friends with our costumer, who was one of the instructors in the department, and she kind of took me under her wing and she said, “You need to really work on this craft that you have naturally.” She goes, “You’ve got all this natural ability and you just aren’t honing it right.” So she became my first coach and coached me how to speak correctly, how to carry myself better, how to break a lot of bad habits that I had.

I went home at Thanksgiving, and I sat mom and dad down and said, “Well, it’s like this. I have a major now.” And they said, “Oh, what?” And I said, “Well, it’s theater.” And dad’s eyes kind of rolled. “But,” I said, “I can make a living at this!” And he goes, “OK, we’ll believe that when we see it.” And so for the past–I’ve been out of college for ten years–and in those ten years, six out of those ten, I’ve only made my living through theater. I’ve never had to get another job. I’ve been (knocks on wood) real lucky as to keep working. I haven’t had any major injuries that have hampered my dancing, and I’ve just kept working the craft, which everybody does. Everybody keeps trying to keep working at it. And dad, I guess, liked what I did, you know, and grew to like it before he died, and mom just loves it. Mom will go almost anywhere that I am to see a show that I’m in. And she’ll probably come when we’re playing in Illinois because she lives in Missouri.

This is the actual first long-term tour that I’ve done. I did a short-term tour in ’91. We did two months. We played Toledo, Ohio, with a vaudeville/burlesque show, and where I was choreographer for that show, and played in Indianapolis at
the Beef and Boards Dinner Theatre, and then moved down to Florida to our permanent house down there, our permanent burlesque house. And worked down there until last summer when the theater was closed. And luckily I called the director (of La Mancha) who was a friend of mine, and he said, "The auditions are in Chicago on this date. Come." And I said, "OK." Made it up there, and they offered me a contract, and the rest they say is "on the road."

You play a different city every night, so that is kind of fun because you never get stuck in one city forever. Now that's also a drawback. I like having some sort of permanency or some sort of roots, and I really haven't had roots in any one place for about five years. I've been moving around from city to city either from theater to theater, or with this, from city to city with the same show. Mom keeps my cat for me. And my cat is finally understanding that I've been gone for a long time, but she remembers me when I do happen to come home for a couple of weeks, and I actually got to have a nice stay at home this past year when we lost our jobs in the summer, because we started this at the end of August with rehearsals, and I was home from the middle of June until I left for New York in August.

I never get tired of doing the same show. I did the same show for almost three years with the vaudeville/burlesque show. Because a new audience is seeing it every night, and they're going to accept the show or reject it in so many different ways that you never can tell how it's going to play to any one audience. We played in Lexington just last weekend, and we've had a string of fifteen to eighteen standing ovations since we opened—we didn't have a night where we didn't have a standing ovation. When we got to Lexington, the audience loved the show but just wouldn't stand up. And they broke our record. Well, we've started the record again, so we're at like six now, or five. So we'll see what happens tonight. Maybe we'll keep the record going. We just thought it was Lexington. They didn't know...they
always stand up for the horse races and not the show. (Laughs)

You always find something different. I find something different. I don’t know about other people. Other people sometimes get real bored with it (doing the same show) after the first couple weeks. Now, ask me in six months if I get bored with the same show, and my answer might be totally different. I have it lucky in this sense because I’m understudying three different roles, and so I’m constantly watching them and also watching the show as dance captain to keep it clean for the director.

A dance captain is basically in charge of keeping the musical numbers clean and also, in case of injuries or understudies having to go on, reblocking the musical numbers if they are involved with them. In my case, if I would have to go on for any of the roles I’m understudying, it would require quite a bit of reblocking because I’m in all of the major production numbers with the Muleteers, who are basically the chorus boys in the show. We’ve worked out enough of it in our minds, and I’ve sat down with the choreographer supervisor, he supervised me in a lot of it, and I talked with him. He and I came up with a lot of ways we could do different things. If I would have to go in for anybody, then what it would mean is that I would basically be doing a lot of double duty. I would be doing both my Muleteer stuff plus also the role.

Before I hooked up with this company, I had choreographed close to fifteen different shows either in St. Louis where I’m originally from or throughout the United States in different companies. And because of my background and because of the dance training I’ve had, they went ahead and offered me the dance captain’s position. If it’s a dance show, usually what will happen is that the company is hired and all the dancers are basically dancing. Then the choreographer will select a person in it, whether it’s the best dancer—it usually isn’t the best dancer because it’s
the one who most understands his or her style that he wants and has the ability to also still be a member of the company and like the company and the company like them and still be able to give them notes and not have the cast go, "You’re just one of us too, why are you giving us notes?" kind of thing. Which can happen sometimes. I’ve had people that I’ve worked with take real offense to me giving them notes because I’m one of the cast. And yet it’s just basically another step. Some dancers don’t ever want to be dance captain though because it’s an extra responsibility.

I’d love to choreograph another show again. I’d like to choreograph a book show again which is what Man of La Mancha is. And in a sense I did choreograph this show. Leo (the supervisor) helped a lot, and a lot of what he did was give me the ideas. Then I would go ahead and take the steps and create what I thought would work the best with them and create the style of what he wanted or what he thought would work. We didn’t know each other before we started, and we worked real good together for the first time. We just kind of worked quickly into a real good rapport with each other.

I’ve always said I would be comfortable taking six months to a year off where all I did was choreograph, and then I would want to work again. And the point where I was when I got this job, I had choreographed so many shows right back to back in Florida that it was real hard for me to keep the creative juices going, and so I needed to work with someone else to let them replenish some of my creativity so that I could see how they worked and I could borrow some of their stuff because there are no new dance steps. It’s all a variation on a theme.

A lot of times you’ll get singers who move well or singers who can’t tell their left from their right. If you’re lucky, you get a company that has at least a few dancers that work really well and know your style and know what you want to do
with it. And what you do is you try to spotlight them in different numbers. First of all, you take the show, whatever show it would be, and you sit down with the director, and you figure out which numbers are predominantly dance oriented and predominantly staging. A lot of the ballads are just staging, you just walk them from here to here and it's a pretty picture and they stand there for a while and they sing and they move around to another place and they might do a turn, and that's about it when it's a ballad. In an uptempo dance number the director's more likely to say, "Take this whole number. This is where I'm leaving them at the end of the scene, the chorus will all come on wherever you want them, and you just move them and tell me where you let them off at the end of the number." Which is kind of how I like to do it if I'm not directing the show also. I like to know where they're going to be so that I don't start them stage right when he's had them ending stage left. And then you just kind of go from there. I try to have a similar style or at least a through line. Maybe it's the same step I'll use in every single number once. So that there's this consistency in the show. And I like doing that because it makes me really think about what I'm doing.

When I was doing the revue shows in Florida, I would do six numbers, and each number had a different style to it which was a lot of fun also because then you never had to repeat anything. But in a book show I like repeating. I like repeating a phrase of the music or a phrase of the dance in any of the big numbers because then it shows that it's the same person's work. And most shows will have the similar style musically through it, unless it's a show like Showboat which spans forty years. You go from 1880's all the way to the 1920's, so you can have all the different styles in that period. Mame is another one that spans the years. That'll start before the crash, which is just the start of the Charleston, until the Forties which is by the end, so you can have some of the Jitterbug at the end of the show. And so it's a lot of fun.
I like finding shows that will give me that ability to stretch a little bit and have different periods, and I'm hopefully, hopefully going to be able to choreograph for a summer company in St. Louis this year. And they're doing The Mystery of Edwin Drood, and I think they're thinking of Funny Girl, but they haven't chosen their season or their staff yet, so hopefully I'll be able to contact them when I'm home in December on break and say, "I want to do it." Now that I've got the tour credit behind me, it's a little bit more of a bankability thing. They'll know I'm a commodity that has worked and is working consistently, as opposed to somebody just coming in and going, "I dance. I want to choreograph." Because some dancers can't choreograph and some choreographers can't dance. It's just kind of the nature of the beast. Choreographers basically make pictures. If they make the right pictures and have the right steps, the choreography works. If they don't have the right steps and still make pictures, it's really very pretty, and it will still work, but...(trails off)

I'm one of those dancers who started kind of late, and yet also didn't get as much training as a lot of people did. I mean, a lot of dancers train from the time that they're kids, and they go to class every day, and they go for five hours a day. I would have loved to have done that, and I had the chance to, but like I said, my dad wouldn't let me. When I started taking class, I started basically in college and then I basically have gone to the class of hands-on. I'll get into a show, and I'll learn from the choreographer, and most choreographers will see something in me that is a drive or a desire to learn and so after they teach the show to me basically, they'll talk to me and they'll share some of their ideas and their steps with me and they'll actually help me that way. So I've basically gone from the school of hard knocks, I guess, and learned that way as opposed to having to bandage the feet up when they're bleeding because you've done too much ballet or wearing the ankle braces because you're tapping your little brains out. And I've gone through the shin
splints, and I've gone through a lot of the same things that dancers have gone through, and I don't have as good of a stretch as a lot of dancers do because I've started so late. But I can split with the best of 'em *(laughs)* and I can kick like anybody. Give me a high kick, and I'll do it!

I'd really love to choreograph...wait a minute...I really loved doing *Pippin.* And I was the Leading Player in that, and I choreographed it also. I'd like to redo that one, and I'd like to redo *West Side Story.* I did *West Side* back in 1984...'83, and I was real young and didn't know as much as I wanted to know and so I look back at videotapes of it and the process that I went through teaching it, and I remember, because I have books of all my choreography and I keep everything on paper, and try to look back on it every once in a while. And every once in a while I'll get really bored and I'll throw in a tape of one of my shows just to see what I did with it. And it's also a good reference like if I'm doing a number similar in style, I can pull that out and say, "I like that step. Boy, I hated that." And so I'd like to do that. I'd like to redo *West Side.* Loved doing *Hello, Dolly.* I was Cornelius in *Dolly.*

A lot of people don't like doing revue shows, but I kind of do because you have a real rapport with the audience. When I was in Florida, I had my own number in the show, so I had five minutes to do whatever I wanted. And so I was basically the song and dance man of the show. We had the chorus, which I was a member of also, and we had our comic and our straight man who was a woman *(laughs)*, and they had me. And usually in a burlesque show or vaudeville/burlesque show, they had a song and dance straight man who did both the straightening for the comics and the song and dance specialty number. And so I would do the song and dance number in the show where it would basically be me singing anything from Gershwin tunes into a big tap number into I would get a lady up out of the audience and sing a song just to her. So it was just a really cute little number,
and I liked doing that and it basically has set me up to be "like Tommy Tune" who goes out with his show and does the "Tommy Tune Tonight."

And I actually have met him, and he's incredible. He's an incredible man. I was standing probably as close as you and I are sitting/standing here. I talked to him for just a second or so or maybe two minutes, and I thought if I said any more to this man, I'd spit on him. And I thought, "I can't do this. I can't spit on Tommy Tune." It's just something that you don't do. Even if they want you to spit on them, you just can't do that. But he's a very sweet man. He liked what--it was for a--you're going to think that I'm lying about things that I've done--it was for a girl's coming out party. It was her debut. And her father had mega bucks, hired sixteen St. Louis dancers, paid them big bucks for one night. Brought in Tommy Tune for one night with his conductor. Brought in the Dirty Dancing tour off the road for one night for this girl's coming out party. We're talking--he owns a theater and he renovated the theater, put a whole new dance floor on stage, brought all this stuff in for one night, for this girl's debut. Incredible. Incredible. I have a tape of it at home and I just sit there at look and I'm like, "This man spent money." I would have wanted just our salaries alone to produce a show.

If I'm producing a show in St. Louis, I can do it for $5,000. Because I won't pay my performers. I'll pay the musicians. But most performers in St. Louis will do it for a while as a thank you. And you might pay them some gas money. I've moved into the next stage now where I'm not doing community theater anymore, and I won't ever go back to it just because I can make a living at this. I don't have to get a real job anymore. And I don't want a real job. I don't like getting up before nine o'clock. (laughs) Even though this bus is making us get up before nine o'clock, none of us are alive until about twelve, and that's when we stop for lunch. It works that way.
I dance because it’s the best type of expression. Because without saying anything and without singing a word, you can evoke any mood you want. In this show there’s “The Abduction”, which is basically a rape scene which is very stylized rape of Aldonza, and I’m the one who gets to be the rapist. And yet I look at that and I’m like, “I can do this, and without saying anything, I can have the entire audience in shock that we’re doing this to this woman.” And it’s a shocking piece in the show. And then I know that I can turn around and I can do Busby Berkley’s song and dance, smiling and chattering and tappin’ and have the audience clappin’ along and singing along and tapping their toes. And I like that. I like knowing that these things that I call my legs can do that. And it’s not just the legs, it’s a fire. It’s a fire that just grows, and when I hear certain music, I just have to go with it. And a lot of people ask why I don’t go out and dance after the show. They’re like, “Why don’t you go out dancing with us?” And I’m like because it’s a whole different thing. It’s not the audience’s response. It’s just a different feel of having this orchestra playing and you’re on stage dancing as opposed to being in some crowded, smoky bar dancing. Because I don’t do contemporary dancing well. So it’s just a drive that keeps me alive. If I wouldn’t be able to dance, and I almost had that happen—I thought I had torn my hamstring a year ago. And I thought I wasn’t going to be able to dance anymore, and I thought my life was going to be over because it’s just something that I have to do, I gotta do it, and I gotta do it until I die.
WORKS CITED


