Dance Arts
Now!
The Official Junior/Secondary NHSDA newsletter
Holiday Edition 2020

This winter, our dancers shine,
as reflected throughout these pages.
Despite recent heartaches,
They share the arts...from a distance...
reaching out to our world community
to bring love and hope.

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PC Greater York Dance, www.gydance.org
Opening Night
Poem By: Audrey Kingree
Artwork By: Nicole Beaudet
Advisor/Sponsor: Rachel Miranda
Ridge High School

A sea of glittering sequins
shimmers and ripples in colorful waves.
The tense comfort of darkness surrounds me,
the calm before the storm.
Arms placed meticulously above hair-sprayed heads,
toes pointed with the utmost care.

The electrical zap of energy and adrenaline courses through us,
a continuous lightning chain of unity.
A hush of anticipation falls over us -
the moment we have worked for is here at last.
Soon the sea of sequins will become a sky of expectant faces.
A mixture of anxiety, excitement,
fear and anticipation swirl and swell inside me,
the impatient butterflies in my stomach
flapping their delicate wings faster
and faster
and faster

Until ~
The curtain is drawn up, suspending
in slow motion.
The jewel colored lights bloom,
piercing the dark stage,
lighting up the sequined costume sea brighter
than ever before,
until it becomes a glittering treasure chest of
rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and pearls.

The music begins,
that familiar tune we are heard countless
times before.
The butterflies suspend in mid-air for
a moment.
My body is itching to move
to perform.
Just another second of waiting...
5, 6, 7, 8...
Showtime
In the Spotlight

Any dancer lucky enough to perform on the Disney Channel, Dancing with the Stars, The Voice, Justin Bieber's tour, and other top tier gigs is both hard working and lucky. I am both; and for the past several years I have lived the "celebrity dance" dream with the professional stage name “Sparkles”.

Auditioning in LA since I was nine, commuting became my normal; booking hotels and missing school was not unusual, and truthfully, it was fun to live the life I thought I wanted. But being famous was not my goal. Surrounding myself with people whose sole purpose was gaining personal recognition showed me my talent must be used for something greater than self-promotion. Accolades were good, but they were not rewarding ~ leaving me hollow.

Teaching Kids

Then I started teaching kids at the studio where I have trained since age seven. Sharing my knowledge of the entertainment industry and my national training was the greatest opportunity and only when I taught, did I understand how to fulfill my purpose ~ to share my gift of dance. It became clear: only by helping build my students’ skills and confidence would I find my creative voice and to truly serve local, national, and global dance communities.

Last year, when coaching a young girl on her solo, I saw she was much harder on herself than any nine-year-old should be. I showed her how to write and say positive self-affirmations while validating her talent and self-worth. This requires careful coaching with immense love and support. I chose the song “You Say” to help her address her self-loathing head on. By the end of the year, her confidence, not to mention her dance skills, had improved dramatically. Maddie’s growth showed my innate ability to guide others on personal journeys in both dance and mental health. To help those around me has not only given my life more substance but has opened doors for a future of service.

While in Fiji, I taught a hip-hop class for disadvantaged children and they taught me Polynesian dance. I was so attached to them I started an International Dance Exchange. Today, I regularly livestream classes and send dance clothes and shoes to them. Dance made the world a smaller place for all of us.

Dance Means Helping Others in Distress

Heartbroken when one mentor, Ryan Lohoff, was diagnosed with Stage 4 brain cancer, I hosted a clothing sale paired with master classes featuring LA choreographers who generously donated their time. We attracted one hundred dancers and raised over $5000, with all proceeds to Ryan's GoFundMe to defray his medical expenses. Following this success, I produced two more fundraisers:
one supporting DPAC foundation scholarships for at-risk kids; the second, a scholarship for a dear friend whose brother has terminal cancer. At the latter, I taught master classes, organized a multi-family garage sale plus a barbecue, and raised over $10,000 for dancers in need.

Dance acts as a wonderful life’s path, guiding us to help others along the way. When considering how to answer questions about growth, I now realize…

I dance to help others, I dance to help change lives, I dance for good.
Growth often happens in ways we least expect. I waltzed into my first dance class at age three and was immediately drawn into a world of wonder ~ the loud thumping of tap shoes, ballet’s princess-like style, and twelve-year-old girls pirouetting across the floor. Five years of recreational classes later, I was ready for far more. At age eight, I committed to Dance Precisions, a pre-professional studio an hour’s drive from my home. That decision changed my artistic path, and I have since progressed in a myriad of ways.

I can now consistently execute split leaps and consecutive pirouettes and have developed a more sophisticated movement style. I perform at international levels, choreograph solos and group performances, and memorize at least ten dances for every competition or show. What I could not have anticipated, however, was the extent to which my dedication would impact my evolution as a human being.

Contrasting Outlooks and Debates
Nearly every day, I left my predominantly Jewish liberal high school and headed south to my mostly Christian conservative dance studio ~ which, at times, felt much farther than 50 miles away. For example, just hours after participating in a nationwide gun protest, I listened to how many of my team members contended: “supplying every student with a firearm is the solution to gun violence.” While my beliefs could not have contrasted more starkly, I challenged myself to ask pointed questions to better understand their perspective. We were able to have an honest conversation despite the deep chasm between our convictions, and then articulated their ideas to my high school friends for more insight into such an opposing view.

While the daily dichotomy sometimes seemed dizzying, being a member of both communities enabled me to learn how to meaningfully discuss and debate different viewpoints. It has also given me a stronger sense of purpose, knowing that I can help people understand our conflicting perspectives when dealing with difficult topics ~ including specific laws, immigration policy, and economic theory ~ to bridge the otherwise polarized communication gap. My simultaneous advancement as both dancer and empathetic individual is especially poignant as I reflect upon my high school graduation and now look towards my life’s next chapter.

Evolving as a Leader
What I truly have learned from dancing is more than technique and performance ~ evolving as a leading voice with open-mindedness, acceptance towards others, and the ability to listen with empathy. I will continue this trajectory into my future. Being thrown into a whirlwind of even more diverse groups, I will initiate respectful yet challenging conversations to eliminate ignorance and closed views. If we can all do this, then maybe a kinder, more than we had ever imagined.
I have been told dancers have a different way of thinking, especially when it comes to music and rhythm. Every time I listen to a song, I tend to feel its flow rush through my body. I find wanting to move along to the beat, imagining choreography in my head. When dancing or performing, the world around me freezes, and my mind is clear. Every worry, fear, or stressful circumstance leaves as I shift through space and time.

The same exuberance happens when I watch others being passionate about dance. Their presence and focus give an indescribable sensation. My favorite goal is to learn a new skill or dance style to allow my body to move in a free, spirited way as never before. Exploring choreography with my friends often broadens my own movement concepts; however, this opportunity may not always be possible ~ as we have recently experienced.

In this difficult time, amid the pandemic and its resulting sense of insecurity, we are restricted from performing and creating the way we normally do. Many people, including myself, have become discouraged and on the verge of forgetting what dance means to us.

On the bright side, my dance teacher shared how the arts community has gathered virtually during this unprecedented time. Many programs throughout the globe have posted online classes, videos, and performances to enrich everyone…

Reminding us of the true magic dance holds.

I now realize I cannot always depend on being physically in a big studio or with my peers to enjoy the movement's freedom. I can experience a similar sensation by creating at home or alone on a stage. Let us remember this joy as we work through any crisis.
Triumphant Dis-Dancing

“Thank you for being a catalyst leading the way to safer theatre gatherings,” shared Rushmore Plaza Civic Center management with the Academy of Dance Arts’ director, Julie McFarland. As the community worked together to host 16 micro-recital indoor performances: “We thought outside the box together, which helped other organizations see safer ways to gather.”

After schools closed last March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Academy’s 20th anniversary performances of Over the Rainbow and Munchkinland were postponed during those dark months...but sunshine appeared in September. With 1200 dancers, families, ad friends, the Academy and Civic Center followed this protocol: limited audience – all in masks – in the theatre to 4% capacity, one-way lines at staggerd times, physical distancing (for dancers, too), and extensive sanitation.

All PC Academy of Dance Arts
“Dance brings life lessons, and what better way to show our children the rewards of resilience and determination than this?” said McFarland. “For us, quitting was not an option.” The whole team dove in with healthy celebration and closure for those children who were unable to dance due to the shutdowns. A “Red Carpet Runway”, dis-danced performances and thank-you gifts were part of the autumn joy. “Sometimes the surprise of adversity helps us find constructive ways to achieve what we love,” shared McFarland.

Of Special Note: The Academy navigated the performance week with zero reports of COVID-19 transmission!

Seeing the smiling dancers’ faces and families expressing their gratitude for the Academy A-team’s efforts made the journey complete. And in their Land-of-Oz journey, they discovered they could still be in a place “where dreams we dare to dream” ~ together! ~ “really do come true!”

Learn more about the Academy of Dance Arts: https://redancearts.com/
News (cont.)

Rural Rules!
“Thanks to our wonderful students and staff ~ We do it all!”

Park City High School, in rural Utah, offers a gem of an energetic dance program. Students advance in classical and entertainment technique along with performing at sports games, in musicals, plus state and national events. Special Advantage: The program offers anatomy and LMA in-site work, and the community appreciates the students in the annual Youth Dance Clinic and visiting seniors’ homes, the local hospital, and elementary school. Great job!

Giving Tree: Holiday Cheer with Open Hearts for a Community

During the winter holidays, teachers at the Dance Connection believe: “The most precious gift we can receive is knowing every child has a wish granted.” For over twenty years the studio has set up a Giving Tree to collect new toys and clothing for local families who need help, and many dancers happily combine their resources for that special gift for a special child. Thank you!
Hip Nut ~ A Holiday Treat!

Greater York Dance offers quality training and guidance for a dancer’s dreams. Its special production, the upbeat Hip Nut, proclaims: “Love Wins!” and auditions are open to “any dancer in the world,” ages 6 and up.

Among the main characters ~ Dismal Diva, Mother Earth, and of course, the legendary Clara!

Set in modern New York City, this Nutcracker has Clara jamming with her friends until a villain disrupts the harmony, chasing her into a cold, chaotic world. Later, happily, she finds refuge in a magical land where multicultural dancers share kindness and joy.

Along the way, our heroine learns a valuable lesson …

“We can mend any hurt when we love each other.”
Congratulations to Ms. Amanda F. Standard, founder of Divine Dance Institute (DDI), for earning this NDEO Award! As a graduate of Howard University, and in her professional tenure, she has mentored throughout the educational spectrum for the enlightenment of all ages and abilities.

“Teaching is the most significant contribution one can make to society. Through the work, in the classroom or at home, we positively influence each generation and cultivate an environment where students become self-reflective and self-sustaining, to positively influence others.”

~ Amanda F. Standard, Visionary, Dancer, Educator, Choreographer, Author

Pictured above, Amanda Standard, and below, her students posing after a fun performance. All PC Divine Dance Institute
This past year, my group members and I choreographed the piece "The Silent Garden" in our annual Winter Dance Showcase. Vincent Van Gogh’s painting Parsonage Garden in the Snow acted as our inspiration.

Our purpose was to express how destructive depression and sadness can be and to explore the dark places where these feelings consume someone. Another purpose was to show the contrast between a lush, beautiful garden and this wasteland depicted in the painting.

The dance began with us lying on the ground, then reaching towards the audience. This action throughout symbolized how we seek something more in life when struggling with depression. As the music became more hard hitting, we utilized quick drops to portray the unpredictability of depression that can arise at any time.
Moving to a close, we explored floor work like sliding into a jazz split and stomach rolls as a motif for hitting “rock bottom.” In the beginning, the stage shone as a light gray silhouette to symbolize the depths of sadness that depression can engulf someone. The lights later brightened, the background color an intense red, to illustrate anger that being stuck in a depressive state can cause.

Choreographing in a group was challenging as I usually compose solos.

It was difficult to include all ideas while creating a unified, aesthetically pleasing routine. Another challenge was combining our Contemporary and Hip-Hop styles, having the piece transition smoothly both musically and choreographically.

In the end, this piece not only portrayed depression, but also our struggles creating in the studio and in everyday life.

PC Ridge High School
"A Gift for Fleur"

By: Anonymous

Unnamed at the NHSDA writer’s request

To protect the Subject’s privacy

Editors’ note: We hope the young lady described here knows she is a beautiful flower, and will remember, "If you look the right way, you can see the whole world is a Garden.” Frances Hodgson Burnett, The Secret Garden

A close friend, a victim of sexual assault, inspired my dance. Her devastating experience had forced her to feel such self-hatred and confusion… she lost all sense of belonging.

Her trust and affinity for connecting with people diminished drastically. From losing her acceptance of innocent physical affection to locking away her feelings, it seemed the loved one I once knew was slowly slipping away. Even through the misery of seeing someone I hold so close be so traumatized, I stayed strong for the sake of her wellbeing, and worked my hardest to be her “light.”

To me, the dance means standing at the face of heartbreak and sacrificing everything to take care of the ones we love. The most difficult part of the choreographic process was struggling to take on both the role of myself throughout this adverse time, but to embody the internal battle between holding back and letting go of the past the girl experienced… and still grapples with today.

Ultimately, choreographing this piece pushed me to empathize in a foreign way, and to deal with my personal grief as this dear one battled through such a trying time.

PC Photographer: Steve Clarke; Dancer/Model: Kara FLower
Janet Jackson Taking A Stand for What is Right
By: Leila Griffin
Appomattox Regional Governor’s School for the Arts and Technology
Advisors/Sponsors: Rebecca Hodal and Denise Purvis

"In light of current Black Lives Matter protests, Leila’s timely writing acts as a useful source for students in their dance history and related courses." ~ Ms. Denise Purvis

Janet Jackson, an American icon of her time, happened to be the youngest of nine siblings within the Jackson musician family. She grew up acting, singing, and dancing. Through her music, she was known for addressing socioeconomic topics in many albums and popular radio hits. She built her legacy around artistic choices regarding elaborate shows and symbolic videos such as Rhythm Nation, a masterful collaboration with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. In this ingenious production, Janet Jackson effectively incorporated symbolism while spreading awareness of the social and economic issues prevalent throughout the United States during the late 1980’s.

In the Janet Jackson article, “Rhythm Nation 1814” on Pitchfork, Julianne Shepherd points to controversial topics dominating the U.S. then. In 1989, George H.W. Bush presided over a country rife with controversy regarding a crack epidemic, gun control, and efforts to address excessive violence across the land. Earth Day became an avenue to raise awareness about the environment. ACT up (AIDS advocacy group) protested at St. Patrick’s Cathedral and crashed the New York Stock Exchange. Rapper KRS One created the “Stop the Violence Movement” to address the violence within African American communities. It was through Janet and her team’s dexterous imaginative ideas, fused with the dissemination of these societal, controversial themes, that influenced the development of Rhythm Nation, one of the most astonishing music videos ever.

In this paper, I analyze The Rhythm Nation video posted to YouTube in 2009 by Janet Jackson’s Vevo. The video creates stark contrasts through black and white images, creating a bold and striking effect. It begins with an elevator descending into a factory-like setting, with water dripping from brick walls, amidst railings and chains. Sitting and sobbing is a young black boy. While crying, there are intermittent flashes back to the water running down the factory walls, construed as the world being emotionally needing change. The boy glances up and around the elevator, noting figures marching downstairs into a smoke-filled factory room with white lights ricocheting off the walls.

Suddenly, a diversified group of various races and nationalities, with Janet Jackson in center position, appear in military attire of black caps, pants, combat boots and jackets with badges outlined with circles and triangles formulating the numbers 1814. The entire concept alludes to Jackson’s album title, Rhythm Nation 1814, upon which the video is based and indicative of the year the national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner” was born. Jackson’s symbolism insinuates the song, “Rhythm Nation” is the national anthem of the present.
As the troop assembles into a military-style triangular formation, they stomp with strong, emphatic, and synchronized movements. As Jackson counts down from 5-4-3-2-1, they grip their feet to the floor, then hop and pivot quickly towards each corner of the factory, with defined head turns, arms, and handwork. The Scene, then switches to the dancers being stationed on different levels or tiers and stairways of the factory, as they slide to the side, stepping firmly into a strong, powerful pose, hands on hips. Jackson steps in singing, and the young boy still watches on.

This is symbolic of Janet’s lyrics, “Let’s work together to improve a way of life. Join voices to protest social injustice.” She goes on, “A generation full of courage, come forth with me.” This singular generation represents a unified people determined to take a stand against the issues of society, while dancers’ formations, movements and poses portray their strength and determination ~ the young boy a victim of circumstance.

The video returns to the group dancing on one industrial platform, Janet in center, all with their smooth but defined, hard-hitting, in-sync moves. Brief scenes are incorporated, one with Janet and four others dancing under some pipes, another with her and two dancers on a tier. The video intermittently reverts to the entire group dancing on a single platform, with the boy gripping a wire fence, watching with great concern and curiosity. Perhaps this is representative of the rhythmic, powerful army in numbers, separating into groups with their leader in the forefront, attempting to divide and conquer the adversities characteristic of our world, while the hopeful victim looks on.

Although it may seem a typical music video, it is evident that symbolism is cleverly conveyed. The location in which the video took place; in a shabby, worn down factory with railings, tall metal tiers, stairs, and huge fans. This dingy setting enhanced the entire video concept and can be interpretive of the world as a dark place full of pain and suffering. Another important component is the quote Jackson utters in the beginning: “We are a nation with no geographic boundaries. Bound together through our beliefs. We are like-minded individuals. Sharing a common vision. Pushing toward a world rid of color lines.” She is expressing that people of the world, with similar beliefs and insights, will stand together and fight for changes they so desire. Not only is she taking a stand for convictions and racial accord but expressing an optimistic vision for the future.

Jackson expresses the aspiration of a world null and void of racial stereotypes and injustice, where people accept all ethnic and cultural differences. The dancers dressed in military attire, performing dynamic and powerful movements in unison, represent Jackson’s compelling message that people must pull together to eliminate destructive complexities of society. She asks everyone to unite, much like a military army, to alleviate these issues and to help make our world a better place. She urges us, “People of the world today, are we looking for a better way of life, we are part of the rhythm nation.”

Symbolic ~ the battle to eradicate color lines
At one point, two dancers execute intense turns and then leap to the floor, followed by another performing with nunchucks. As if there is a war with weapons, this signifies the anger felt towards the negative issues and occurrences of the world. The boy in the beginning and intently observing the dancers
throughout, can be assumed to be a citizen in a vulnerable state, hoping for change and a brighter future. His tears and regard towards the dancers communicate an unhappy, young, and desperate soul, seeking stability and an aspiration for a better way of life.

Reviews reveal, critics agreed, not only did this creation stand up for our past problems but addressed issues of our present world. Commentators congratulated Janet on her artistic choices; they applauded her decision to make the video black and white for the choreography to shine through. What began as an idea to bring people together through rhythm and music, evolved into a vehicle addressing the problems of the world. In a Billboard interview, Jimmy Jam, Jackson’s songwriter, explained this was not the early intent, but the song had to become political, a statement about social justice, after watching CNN broadcast stories of violence, homelessness, and racism. In the Janet Jackson/Rhythm Nation/Breaking the Colorlines documentary, Jackson recalls how reports on prostitution, child abuse, and drugs affected her to speak out to end these horrors.

Ultimately, this “Rhythm Nation” collaboration by Janet Jackson, Terry Lewis, and Jimmy Jam opened minds and touched hearts about controversial world issues, urging us all to unite and take a powerful stand...

Amongst all the turmoil, hate, and strife still so imminent, perhaps one day all people ~ of all backgrounds and races ~ will truly recognize the plight of our world and stand together to evoke change. As Jackson sings, “People of the world unite. Strength in numbers we can get it right.” ~ Leila

References


Response to “Aesha Ash Takes Her Place at the Head of the Class”
Review By: Anish Aradhey
Harrisonburg High School
Advisor/Sponsor: Amber Corriston

At my first ballet performance, the father of another dancer noticed me and commented: “I was wondering where all the guys are.” The excited opening-night butterflies soured in my stomach as I realized I was the only male dancer in the entire recital. I began dancing in middle school, later than some of my peers who have danced since toddlerhood. However, being a male dancer of color already made me feel isolated, like I wanted to shrink out of sight. Worst of all, dancers like me often normalize or succumb to this strain...

Then I read Gia Kourlas’ article “Aesha Ash Takes Her Place at the Head of the Class” in the New York Times (13 Aug.), which tells a forgotten story of minority dancers “hurt by the dance world.”

Despite battling stereotypes and racial comments every day, former City Ballet dancer Aesha Ash will be the first permanent Black female teacher at the School of American Ballet. Her Swan Dreams Photography Project also combats biases ~ yet, she is “scared to death” in her latest challenge. Learning
about Ms. Ash’s achievements made me overjoyed, but also angry: Why is this boundary only now being broken?

Despite challenges, diversity in dance is improving. Last year, my school’s program made efforts to include more teachers and students of color in our musical. This action inspired our young dancers while bringing unity across my community, and so…

Ms. Ash and her story, along with my own experience, make me hopeful for dance’s future.

Ms. Ash’s return to dance after her drive to perform “had died” reminds me that dance is so much deeper than its appearance ~ it connects our world. Ultimately, by making dance equitable, we must encourage all dancers to blossom.
Scottish Spirit
By: Anna Binkley
2020 Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award
Center for Dance and the Performing Arts
Advisor/Sponsor: Kathryn Austin

The intent of my choreography, titled “Spirit of the Wild,” was to portray the pride of the Scottish people and the history of their Highland dance. The piece is inspired by how the style represents cultural freedom against foreign rule – and as a source of growth and strength in my life.

A challenge in the choreographic process was creating new combinations with greater rigor and difficulty than my solos in previous competitions. An advantage was being familiar with the Highland steps and movements that I had recently studied in my preparation to become a certified Scottish Highland instructor through the British Association of Teachers of Dancing.

Special is the ability to story-tell and to offer an inspiring moment as discovered within Scottish culture. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to share my piece with audiences amid the international dance community.

PC Anna Binkley
Wishing All
Peace & Joy
Dancing into the New Year!

Artwork & Writing by: Britney Sanchez
Park City High School
Advisor/Sponsor: Ashley Mott

Every living soul, like my bear depicted here, should thrive within a truly natural environment. However, a large part of life is finding balance between multiple responsibilities. To achieve this takes time, courage, and determination, and for many, including myself, said balance is nearly impossible, especially when hundreds of ideas and stories swarm through and around our heads all day. Thankfully, it is dance class where I enter a completely new mindset, where no outside concerns or fears dare consume my thoughts. Rather, I indulge in the present moment and find peace and joy through movement. ~ Britney Sanchez
Dance Arts Now!
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Dance Arts Now! is a publication of
8609 2nd Avenue, Suite 203-B Silver Spring, MD 20910 301.585.2880
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PC Dance Expressions