Dance Arts

Now!
The official Junior/Secondary NHSDA Newsletter
Holiday Edition 2022

All PC Midshore Dance Academy
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This festive season welcomes the gift of sharing and love for all in dancing!
A Fantasy A Dream
By: Courtney Green
Gulliver Preparatory High School
Advisor/Sponsor: Gerri M. Barreras

How I feel dancing turned into a scene
the water falling as if I am wringing sweat out of my dance tights
Flowers pressing against the house as if begging to be taken in
I envision myself gliding across the river, envy filling me in the way
this fantasy cannot be my reality.
I flicking my thoughts out of my head to enjoy the peace
I feel just by seeing this artwork
I dab at my face to feel tears not of sadness
but happiness, love, and peace,

Dance and Movement
The river flows, as does my movement
I leap and jump, and then I wake up
A vivid dream
One just for me.
The Stage
By: Raelynn Dolatta
Consuming Fire School of Dance
Sponsor/Advisor: Donna Jameson

The curtain opens,
The lights turn on,
The music plays,
I dance.

The backstage nerves,
The music starts,
I go onstage,
And all my fears are gone.

The show is thrilling,
I bow,
The audience claps,
The feeling is amazing.
In 2010, Mom reached for our silver Casio camera and encouraged me to strike a pose. Jumping off the sofa, then leaning into its thick armrest, I burst into a smile as wide as my small, round face. My leg shot behind posed in an awkward, exaggerated grand arabesque, but I did not mind. This 5-year-old self-engaged enthusiastically, already bedecked in a hot pink tutu, sequins running down my torso, pink roses adorning the neckline, pink tights, but no ballet slippers! Although my upcoming recital required my favorite costume, I loved wearing it around the house all the time for fun.

The photo Mom took that day reminds me of the thrill of dancing around my living room as a child. Exploring movement freely still enthralls me about dance. This vivid memory connects to much more than my early childhood; it defines my source of creativity, tenacity, and passion. I was removing the training wheels, allowing myself to enter the artistic playground head-first to experiment without limits.

Transferring to Miami Arts Charter School, I found an environment encouraging me to adapt to diverse styles. I blossomed to become more attentive and stricter about positioning my arms in the correct silhouette before crossing the floor in Modern Dance class. I merged new skills at ballet school, experimenting with musicality to accentuate my movements to become second nature. My confidence grew, and so did my heart. I remembered how dance made me feel elated!

That dance playground I found at age 5 is what I now visit every day. The studio floor is the living room carpet; the barre is the sofa’s supporting armrest; the mirror is the puddle of water I find when I dance outdoors. Today, I transport myself to this playground, seeking my artistry achieved by exploring my ability to form my movements creatively. I still see the child, supported by the thick armrest, her awkward hops, suspensions, and extensions, as I now share the joy of accomplishment with friends, family, and other artists. I aspire to enter a college dance BFA program in the next chapter of my life. There, I want to continue to transform and nurture my inner artist through dance, absorb and use the knowledge shared by my mentors, expand the boundaries of my work, and have the opportunity to collaborate and perform with other creative artists.

I aim to engage completely throughout the creative force ~ in dance, music, nature, and all that stirs, inspires, and compels us. Whether inside or outside the studio and stage, I hope to inspire with my innovations ~

I am creating in the living room, playground, studio, stage, and everywhere!
I was a naïve, confused child from a foundational upbringing torn apart by deceit and dysfunction. I fell so innocently for the mirage my mother had portrayed, to have it shattered the day I sat waiting by the front door for her to come home, but, She never did.

Instead, I faced my father hours later; he explained we would trace my mom to the Garland County Detention Center because of her drug possession and embezzlement. I could not understand how the person I looked up to the most could be capable of such duplicity. My mother struggled with addiction from an early age, creating a chain effect of conflicts that continued to challenge my growth as a young woman.

As the world around me shifted, I began searching for what I had longed for ~ control and stability. It took me years to battle perfectionist qualities that only held me back from further achieving any real sense of solidity in who I was. My mother and I struggled to return to normalcy throughout my adolescent years. Her actions prompted my parents' separation, and she continued to reject her children's needs for those of her abusive partners. She led my siblings and me through a constant downward spiral.

But amidst all the chaos, one dream remained constant ~ and that was dance.

Dance has always been my refuge and is significant in my growth and development. And I am grateful to my teachers who have mentored me. Not realizing it initially, this art form gave me pure joy and a sense of purpose and direction. Anytime I felt myself slipping into the numb emptiness of repressed emotions, I could silence these thoughts by channeling that energy into movement. My mother was in and out of my life; the studio was where I could always safely return.

Through the adversity I have experienced, I learned everything happens for a reason. These struggles taught me resilience and how to take accountability for myself and the life I want to pursue. I could not continue to push my past away and reserve those feelings. Instead, I used it as motivation to strive to be the best version of myself.

I took the cherished memories, the sweet sentiments of my upbringing, to leave negative experiences that challenged my self-worth. With dance as my primary method of self-expression, my eyes opened to a world of opportunity where I could be more than the little girl who grew up without her mom.
Dance has taught me not to take my past as an excuse to give up, and I am strong today despite hardships. I never lost sight of who I was, and I believe I will thrive through all my work and perseverance. Hopefully, one day, I will ignite the passion for the arts in others as my teachers have for me.
I gave up every other childhood activity for dance. Initially, I thought this life was about “good technique” and succeeding in competition. However, a realization emerged when I attended a Vocational Dance Academy (VDA) performance. The students moved me emotionally with their intriguing way of dancing; their abstract flow with improvisational elements differed from those in competitions. Because I wanted to learn more, I joined this expert institution. I was excited and ready to explore this idea further ~ to interpret dances in ways I never thought existed.

Dance had a deeper meaning when I participated in VDA-sponsored intensives, including RIOULT Dance and Alonzo King’s Lines. The creative significance behind every choreographic work became more art of expression than just a way to display skills. Outstanding are the ideas behind classic pieces such as Martha Graham’s “Lamentation” and Alvin Ailey’s “Revelations.” Because of this, I am motivated to take creative risks and explore more with my choreography.

Dance has also helped me develop many life skills. I now work well with groups through collaboration and partner work, receiving encouragement to be my best. Last-minute changes to choreography and learning many teaching styles have taught adaptability. Managing long hours at the studio and school has taught me time management. These traits are now part of who I am, with a solid determination, dedication, and self-discipline for success.

As my mentors influenced me, I hope to impact younger students as a positive role model. I looked to my teachers and the more advanced dancers and strived to be like them. I want to share the endless possibilities to help others make beautiful discoveries. I want to expand my artistry knowledge and grow into a college dance program or company. I have loved to perform ever since I was three, and it has given me the passion and confidence to serve in large groups.

Sharing creative ideas and drawing feelings from an audience creates a sense of accomplishment, which I will strive for throughout my life.
Dreams Take Center Stage!

The Melina Dance Company (MDC), located in Lorton, VA, creates a place where dreams take center stage, with its NHSDA chapter members promoting positivity in and out of the studio. Along with their Pizzazz Performance Company, the dancers entertain the community through concerts and workshops across the Northern VA and DC Metro areas.

The students love sharing dance with the little ones by teaching creative movement and reading dance-inspired children’s stories to them. These resolute NHSDA members have participated in the Out of the Darkness Community Walk in Washington, DC, to raise funds supporting suicide awareness and resources for hope and healing. Noted studio owner Krystal Klem: “Our NHSDA is walking so everyone can dance tomorrow. Together we can change the conversation about mental health and stop this tragic loss of life.”

MDC participates in the Youth Protection Advocates in Dance® Certified, which secures the safety of their students with:

* Background checked CPR certified Teachers,
* Safer Studio™ Policy Teacher Training & Curriculum,
* Secured facilities, viewing windows, &
* Guarded social media practices.
Of particular note, the Integrative Dance program offers classes and dance attire at no cost for dancers with special needs and individual learning differences. Additionally, Melina's Integrative Dance students participate with their peers in all MDC performances, raising awareness of the importance of dance for everyone. Klem continued:

“Our job is to make dance class accessible to each student who walks through our doors, working with their needs.”
In her Hip Hopera production, “Sympathy,” choreographer Aliyah Niara Daniel added touches of tutting and other unique combinations to compliment the performance. When asked about the assignment, she replied, "This is amazing ~ I enjoy the challenge of choreographing Hip Hop dances to music not typical to the genre."

“Hip Hopera” is a fusion of Hip Hop dance with operatic music. One newspaper reported that the choreographers did “a brilliant job bringing the two [worlds] together…The shows were a huge hit! The juxtaposition of opera music and Hip Hop Dance wowed the audience. The opera shows were at capacity, and each ended with a rousing standing ovation.” The elements smoothly connected classical scenes with a finale showstopper ~ a fine accomplishment for Aliyah and iDance.

Stated María Daniel, Lead Choreographer for the Hip Hopera and the iDance Ministry Founder/Director: "Aliyah is an asset to our productions; she brings a unique perspective to the choreography team. She is not afraid to create challenging choreography that is unexpected and mind-blowing. When I collaborate with Niara, I do not see only a teenager. I see an incredibly talented choreographer and an amazing dancer. I am excited to see what the future holds."

After the success of the Hip Hop Opera, Aliyah took on a more active role in teaching, providing choreography, leadership, and performing at major events for iDance Ministry, whose purpose is to: “Educate, Elevate, and Impact the World through Dance.” She now acts as an Artistic Associate and Instructor for iDance Ministry. In addition to teaching, she leads community-based workshops, choreographs, and performs at high-profile national venues. She has been instrumental in the new Hip Hop Teacher Certification Program and prominently featured in the Hip Hop Experience Teacher Video Tutorials. Aliyah works tirelessly onstage and behind the scenes to make the company successful.

Of particular note is Aliyah’s role in the Youth Dance Ambassador Program, training teens as spiritual leaders, community volunteers, and artists. She has appeared on national television in features on the Dance Ambassador program.
Aliyah challenges herself, and the iDance team, which has expanded its quality education and outreach, with an NBC co-sponsorship for National Dance Week, which now streams via YouTube and the copyrighted Curriculum for Hip Hop Dance serving several states.

“Alliyah’s contributions are significant, positively impacting many lives, and she is at the forefront of all we do.”

Learn more about Riddance Ministry: www.idanceministry.com
Gifts for SOA Dancers

The Charleston County School of the Arts (SOA) Dance Department combines academics with creativity. Based on the National and South Carolina Dance Standards, the Curriculum prepares students to succeed including:

- Artistic & Tech skills in a state-of-the-art theater,
- Multicultural styles,
- Masterclasses with guest artists,
- Student choreography from eighth grade solos to Senior Thesis,
- Advanced Placement,
- Dance festivals & educational tours.

In memory of SOA Dance Founder Cecelia Slowinski, a scholarship supports summer study for exemplary students. In her 40 years as an educator, she touched many hearts. Ms. Slowinski’s professional career included the Harkness Youth Company and the Robert Ivey Ballet. Her second passion was beauty in nature, as she described the magic of climbing a mountain:

"I would close my eyes, breathe the air, feel the warm sun on my face, and think, 'Isn’t life wonderful?’ I can still close my eyes and imagine I am there."

And this love for nature continues to inspire the SOA dancers on their creative journey.
At The Dance Inn, NHSDA members explore movement as an interdisciplinary subject. Performing in harmony with their original choreography, the students blend in visual art and musical score compositions to achieve fulfilling outcomes.

Here is how one dancer studied a painting, then created her beautiful photograph!

During Isabelle James’ sophomore year, she reimagined a professional artist’s painting as a photography assignment. She chose the piece “Before the Dance” — Andrew Atroshenko’s portrait of a young ballerina tying her pointe shoes. With our model Christie Burnside posing, Isabelle snapped this picture. The painting came to life through her photo, and the final product stands alone as a beautiful composition.
Kudos to Ms. Rebecca McGregor for earning the NDEO Outstanding Leadership Award! Her “Core Values” are honor and integrity; her “Mission” is to honor oneself and others with integrity amid courage. After developing the Lyndon Institute dance program, she established her school’s NHSDA chapter. Lyndon Institute offers an in-depth program with age-appropriate training for beginning to advanced teenage students.

Ms. McGregor, as an arts advocate, acts on the NDEO Mentorship Committee and more.

She gives presentations nationally, earns awards for her educational contributions, and serves her community at the Vermont Leadership Institute.

Students applaud Ms. McGregor: "Our teacher always supports us, never gives up, and pulls the best out of us in every situation. We are now goal-oriented, with vision, and work hard towards success. We are a team, a family ~ and we love it. We take pride in our work and enjoy sharing dance with our community. Thank you, Ms. McGregor!"
My piece, "Embodied Cognition," is meant to be an educational, multi-disciplinary work ~ creating a visual to the psychological concept that we cannot see to help people understand better.

Embodied cognition and its relationship to art is
The process by which we relate to and feel transcended by another place through viewing art in person.

When we perform, our neurons flow outward to allow us to act.

When we absorb information, these neurons travel inward, so we can understand what we are perceiving.

The notable aspect of viewing art in person is that our neurons travel bidirectionally, thus truly immersing the viewer.

In my piece, if we imagine every sound as a neuron, we can see toes and heels rapidly moving left, right, up, down, and corner to corner.

Tap dance has one more element that encapsulates our attention, and that is the music it creates.

Engaging sight and sound, embodied cognition is shown and taught while helping you to experience it.

My body and arms fling into the air, onto the ground and find the center as well.

Simultaneously, I hope to cause my viewers to undergo this process because dance is a medium of art.

A dancer connects deeply with the audience, who leave viewing the world around them compassionately.
I am presenting a performative sociological dance piece to bring more activism into the arts. Dance moves beyond aesthetics – it can and should function as a platform for social justice. As of 2020, an estimated 5.17 million Americans may not vote due to a felony conviction. My arts-based research presentation, Disenfranchisement, focuses on this suppression.

These citizens returning into society must carry the label “ex-felon” for the rest of their lives, as they face extreme discrimination daily in voting, housing, and jobs. They have paid their debt, so taking more from those who have lost so much is unfair.

The challenges I encountered while creating were those of any piece of art. How do I tell this story effectively? What should be the focus? In my research, I found many returning citizens feel in limbo – a citizen, but not quite. A good chunk of the choreographic process was capturing the correct flow to portray empathy powerfully.

In retrospect to my advocacy efforts, dance has always made me feel my honest self. Explaining what “feeling like myself” challenges one who hates confinement to boxes or labels. My person is forever changing, and dance gives me the space to figure that out.

Regardless of what I will do in the future, I am forever grateful to dance.

I once was a chubby kid, which still affects me. This insecurity may seem superficial, but whatever weakness society may judge still hurts emotionally. Although never been bullied, this feeling made me uncomfortable, which was no surprise considering ballet’s “ideal body.”

There were other issues. Being Black, with a different hair type than the other girls, I stood out in class. As for tuition, others did not understand my family’s economic impact during those years. Still, I thank my loved ones for their sacrifice.

Despite these three factors that made me the odd one out, I belonged because dance is my voice. Yes, I love talking, but everything often comes out in a jumbled mess, with thoughts circling simultaneously. Yet dance centers my brain, projecting the strength to create a flow within each task. Yet many outside a studio hit obstacles with no solace; unfortunately, these unprotected souls resort to risky behavior.

In this light, I am curating a plan: My big picture is to be a dancer who creates advocacy and social reconstruction within arts-based research. This idea surfaced
through an introduction to sociology class I took one semester, and I realized my passion for sociological imagination, which connects private troubles to public issues. What would be a better way to do that than on a “stage,” telling the human story through the literal human form? “Stage” is in quotations because it can be anything, a greenspace, over Zoom, in a parking lot. The idea is how the information presents a real need. Not everyone can read and comprehend a 20-page research paper because we all learn differently ~ I hope to make such content accessible to a broader population through movement.

I want to create what is rewarding and constructive. I know movement heals, and I will develop such a service giving people space with the benefits of dance. This program includes classes for a minimal fee or with financial assistance. This way, I will support myself by doing what I love while helping others, especially those re-entering society.

Because anything can be considered a stage, I will serve recreational centers, schools, offices, prisons ~ and everywhere. The number of people at all levels who cannot experience healing with movement are astronomical; being unable to take time for themselves, they burn out. I want to go to places where they cannot connect with their bodies and help them heal. The goal is to create a flexible movement service utilized within the community. I will prove dance is of greater value than how society too often underestimates its power.

I hope the viewer sees these images that my head has been creating since I was 12 ~ finding value in art while supporting the underserved. My dance “Disenfranchised” reflected my need to advocate for the faceless. A world devoid of healing, of mindless wooden models that others control, must not trap us. A great deal of mid-level movement captured this struggle.

I view issues as endless, which makes my movements circular. Yet, there are some abrupt stops as interruptions in this cycle. That is activism ~ the change.
The premise around “Closet of Emotions” is the endless emotions we feel daily. Every morning we go into our closet and pick out an outfit. Whether tasteful, comfortable, or dynamic, this outfit is what you present to everyone around you. Now imagine a closet full of clothes, renamed emotions. My favorite pair of pants, Joy, my softest sweatpants, Comfort, my tight-fitted button-up shirt, anxious.

The outfits I pick out the most have: happiness on the left, my sadness on the right, or my joy in the back corner, tucked between an enormous pile of clothes. Which emotions do I pick today from my “Closet of Emotions.”

At the beginning of the choreographic process, I wanted a direct and real-life inspiration to drive my creative liberty. I decided to go into my closet and sort through outfits. I then designated each outfit with a specific emotion that I remember while wearing it. Then I went to a close friend’s house and asked her to do the same. I repeated this step three times to select the emotions I wanted to portray in my creative movement.

My challenge throughout this dance was keeping the intention of movement. The purpose behind every weight transfer, the meaning behind every hand motion, and most importantly, the expression I am representing. Since this piece surrounds emotion, I encountered a considerable challenge throughout the choreographic process by portraying each emotion in complete understanding.
The title of my piece is “Expectations.” We live in a world where everyone compares and competes against each other, which can be motivating for some, but often sets unrealistic expectations for others. The song “People Watching” by Conan Gray is a perfect example of this concept, as he sings about seeing other happy couples, wondering when he will feel love for himself. I used the idea my choreography, but converted the theme of love to happiness as it has always been a struggle for me to recognize my achievements and not set expectations for me based on comparisons with others.

I started to dance at age 11, and I would often compare myself to other dancers who were far more advanced than me at the same age. It was not until I started focusing on myself that I learned that the act of “people watching” should not influence my own identity. By trusting my abilities and concentrating on my personal growth, I found happiness, as reflected in my choreography.

Initially, I made my movements calculated and restricted to symbolize the strict expectations we set for ourselves. As the music progresses, I dance with a sense of freedom and let go of others’ standards. This shift symbolizes my realization to be proud of myself and help others gloriously realize the same.
Wishing All
Peace & Joy
Dancing into the New Year!
Dance Arts Now!

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PC: All That Dance