



## *Dance Arts*

*Now!*

*The official Junior/Secondary NHSDA Newsletter*

*2025 Spring Edition*





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2025 Spring Edition***

***"At the table with peers from all the arts,  
We advocate strongly, each playing our parts.  
Together, we are stronger, our voices aligned,  
Promoting dance education with goals intertwined."  
~ Susan McGreevy-Nichols, NDEO Executive Director***

***Welcome to our special Advocacy edition! Here, we present blueprints, testimonials, and proof that dance education positively impacts us in and out of the studio. Dancers may appear as delicate flowers, but our roots are strong!***

***"Join the movement and be part of the plan ~ For dance education, take a stand!"***



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*PC Stevenson High School*



## Why Dance?

By: Today's Dance Center

There are so many excellent benefits of dance throughout our lives. We at TDC feel the most critical aspects are discipline, self-esteem, time management, sportsmanship, good health, & friendships.

The following are more great reasons why we should dance:

### ~ Balance, Grace, and Good Posture ~

When learning techniques, particularly ballet, these elements are all part of movements encouraged and promoted.

### ~ Fitness ~

Dancing helps build muscle, burn fat, and elevate heart rates, which are good for fighting childhood obesity.

### ~ Coordination ~

While learning, the movements repeat, which merges everything with great momentum.

### ~ Motor Skills ~

When experts discuss developing gross motor skills, dance is always near the top. Dancing is a fantastic way to get those large muscles moving!

### ~ Self-Expression ~

Children who are shy or have trouble expressing themselves verbally can express themselves through movement.

### ~ Self-Confidence ~

Mastering a move or technique can give children a feeling of empowerment.

### ~ Release Energy ~

Dance gives children an opportunity to use their energy with a positive outcome.

### ~ Social Benefits ~

Dance can help with team building and allow children to step out of their comfort zone, try new things, and make new friends.

### ~ Rhythm ~

Children move constantly, but when you add music, something magical happens! It is natural for most children to try to move with the sound.

### ~ Dancing is for Life! ~





PC McKenna Dunn



## **Viewpoint**

### **"What Color is Your Butterfly?"**

**By: McKenna Dunn**

**Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Dee Buchanan**

**Dee Buchanan Studio of Dance**

**I** began formal technique at the Dee Buchanan Studio of Dance when I was five years old, but dance impacted my life well before that.

Growing up, my babysitter's daughters also danced, and they would take care of my sister and me while our mother was at work. They taught us how to stretch by creating engaging activities, such as asking, "What color is your butterfly?" while in a butterfly pose. They fostered this love for dance, and once I started classes, I was entranced.

Dance taught me the passion of loving something so much that our hearts feel full whenever we do it or think about it. Dance has taught me soft skills that I use in other applications. I now manage my time, have become a leader, and confidently communicate. After school, I have color guard rehearsal in the fall, dance team in the winter, and the school musical in the spring. After rehearsals, I danced at the studio until 9:30 pm. Then, I could manage my time and finish my homework so that I could sleep at a reasonable time for school the next day. In my junior and senior years, I have been fortunate to teach eight classes a week, with students ages three to fourteen.

Learning to command a classroom and get students to listen was a learning curve, but it has made me a better leader.

Partnering has helped my communication skills, such as discussing safety to prevent injuries. My studio family has shaped my development, pushing me as a performer and a whole person. I applaud the role models who are artists and leaders. The dancers I respect participate in marching band, school musicals, and liturgical performances ~ making the people around them feel validated. Due to their positive impact, I aspire to be the "big kid" I always had as a role model for younger dancers.

I continue spreading positive messages to be "the good in the world," inspiring others to act the same. I would not have this mission without my role models, and thus, I will always be grateful for dance and the incredible culture it nurtures.





## Viewpoint

### "The Roots of Dance Push Us to Grow"

By: *Sophie Unsell*

*Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award*

*Sponsor/Advisor: Dex Honea*

*Colorado Ballet Soc*

*PC Sophie Unsell*

**M**y best memories revolve around the days I gleefully leaped across my family's kitchen. I still experience that innocent young joy, and as I prepare for university, I reflect on dance's impact as a constant in my ever-changing life.

With my father in the Air Force, I knew I would be moving regularly, so when my family returned from living abroad, I was behind in training. I had to remain incredibly disciplined to catch up with my peers. Still, no matter where we travel, dance remains the cornerstone to building my confidence in establishing roots in any new community with a sense of belonging.

Dance has taught invaluable skills not learned from a textbook: perseverance, discipline, mental toughness, and time management. Time management is the skill I have mastered the most! I am much better prepared for the future, having learned to balance dance, school, homework, and extracurricular activities. As dancers, we must remain mentally tough to receive criticisms and corrections. I have experienced firsthand the positive outcome of critiques as it pushes

us to be the best. Through casting and auditions, disappointment and rejection are a part of life ~ and what builds determination pushing us to grow.

Because dance has shown me the importance of community, my mission is to help those around me feel included. I have been a LINK Crew leader at school, mentoring incoming students in acclimating to their unique environment. I am also co-president of "Student 2 Student," which strives to accompany new military dependents arriving at my school. Additionally, I participate in four Honors Societies, including the National Honors Society of Dance Arts. Through these organizations, I can enhance the lives of those around me through community service.

Dance has impacted me in and out of the studio, allowing me to discover my love for building community and the sciences. My experience dealing with dance-related injuries has pushed me to pursue a career in Physical Therapy to keep the next generation of artists and athletes strong and healthy.

I am confident that the little girl prancing around her kitchen would feel elated to see where she is today.





**Good News!**  
**Call for NHSDA Members to Advocate  
for Quality Dance Education in  
Our Schools!**

**Here are ways students and sponsors can strengthen  
the local and national voice for dance education  
centered on the arts and healthy well-being:**

- ✓ *Advocate in our schools ~ Speak up!*
- ✓ *Relay student achievements and statistics on  
how dance education raises critical thinking, test  
scores, and grades*
- ✓ *Incorporate Standards and arts integrative learning into  
the curriculum and extracurricular activities*
- ✓ *Write support letters to government officials and multimedia*
- ✓ *Participate in community service*

Go to <https://www.ndeo.org/Advocate> for more Advocacy exercises!



PC NDEO



**+PLUS+**

**Share NDEO's National College Dance  
Directory  
With Our NHSDA Members!  
Explore undergraduate and  
graduate programs**

**The NDEO National College Dance  
Directory includes universities, colleges,  
and conservatories that offer Dance and  
Dance Education degrees and minors:  
[https://www.ndeo.org/Connect/College-  
Dance-Directory](https://www.ndeo.org/Connect/College-Dance-Directory).**

PC NDEO

+ PLUS+

*A Model Advocacy Document by  
NHSDA Member Jaya Dave,  
Washington Rock Dance*



*Like Jaya, we all must take action to advocate for quality dance education in our schools!*

**M**artha Graham commented, "Dancing is just discovery, discovery, discovery." I have adopted this belief in my artistic pursuits, which teaches the importance of embracing curiosity, staying present in the learning process, and finding beauty in the constant push to better oneself physically and mentally while supporting our community.

Dance allows me to better connect with others, both on and off stage, as opportunities surround me. I continue to perform and create ~ making the unimaginable imaginable and, therefore, actionable. Dance makes me curious to explore beyond pure technique. I wish to apply this confident voice to advocate for quality dance education for those close to us and our future generations.

Although neglected in recent years, I spearheaded an urgent effort to reinstate dance into my high school curriculum. Every student, regardless of socioeconomic background, should be able to learn the arts as integrative learning and a healthy lifestyle. After writing letters to school administrators, securing 500 student signatures, and presenting my platform before the board of education, I succeeded in having dance reinstated as part of our curriculum. I aspire to continue this work and to open a studio that promotes a creative environment for young artists of all ages and abilities to grow. Furthermore, I will teach with the hope that dance helps students to unearth and strengthen their voices. I will give back what dance has given me so that young people will aspire in ways they never imagined possible.

I look forward to my future as a dancer, teacher, leader, advocate, and relentless voice for change and quality dance education. Learn more at <https://www.ndeo.org/Advocate>.



*Advance the Field of Dance Education ~  
Establish NHSDA Chapters Across Our States and Nation!*


**E**stablishing NHSDA chapters in our schools is one crucial way to advance dance education. Celebrating exceptional students' artistic merit, leadership, and academic achievements creates honor and prestige within and outside our field. We encourage our NHSDA members to empower themselves by acting throughout our states and nation. Welcome neighboring schools to start their chapters to collaborate in workshops, performances, and advocacy as a united, powerful voice. Speak out for dance education!

Go to: <https://www.ndeo.org/nhsda/About-NHSDA>.





**+PLUS+**  
**More Advocacy!**  
**Mark Your Calendars!**

***Dance -A-Difference Week, March 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>***   
***Thank A Dance Teacher Day, May 1<sup>st</sup>***  
***NHSDA Day of Recognition, TBA***



*All PC NDEO*





PC Bellaire HS eMotion Dance Company

**Good News! (cont.)**  
**Dance Advocacy at Work!**

*Thank you to Sanja Korman for contributing to this article!*

**Congratulations to Westside HS Inertia Dance Company and Bellaire HS eMotion Dance Company on their Dance Invitational Division 1 rating at Katy ISD, a pilot UIL dance evaluation project. UIL is the acronym for the University Interscholastic League, which provides extracurricular academic, athletic, and arts contests for high school districts. UIL operates through the University of Texas under the auspices of the Deputy to the President for Government Affairs.**

**Why do interschool activities? Self-motivation, teamwork, respect for all competitors, and intellectual curiosity unite with physical training and good health habits. Learn more about UIL:**

<https://www.uil texas.org/about>.

**Kudos to these Houston area students as leaders advocating for quality dance education and ~ Closing the event with a bang!**



PC Westside HS Inertia Dance Comp



**Good News! (cont.)**  
**Studio B Dance Center Advocates**  
**For Safe, Quality Programs**

**F**rom first grade through high school, Studio B Dance Center has a program for every child. The staff exclaims, "If you love to perform and enjoy being with other like-minded dancers, we invite you to join our performing groups." The state-of-the-art facility is a welcoming place for the tiniest ballerinas and the trendiest teen dancers.

Student dancers become flexible, improve their skills, and build self-esteem. The caring staff encourages every dancer to be their best, repeating these words:



In the STAR Leadership Student Teacher Program, NHSDA apprentices train in values-focused leadership.

Requirements include class attendance, teacher recommendations, following the studio curriculum, and mentoring the youngest dancers.

The health and safety of staff, students, and families are the highest priority! That is why the establishment earned certification as a "Safer Studio," following the guidelines of "More than Just Great Dancing." Their plan addresses operational changes, preventive measures, and policy adjustments to facilitate the safest services.



**Because of Dance...**

"I have met some of the kindest, most genuine people I have ever known. Some I have known for years, while others I have just begun to spend more time with. Yet, whether new or old, these girls have supported me endlessly and I am so grateful to call them friends."

*Maria*

*All PC Studio B Dance Center*



### *More Studio B Dance Center Highlights!*

- ✦ Company dancers perform at nursing homes and later celebrate with a pizza party
- ✦ Collaborate with '*More Than Just Great Dancing*' schools in an exhibition to raise funds for local charities
- ✦ Join in an in-house Holiday Ballet Performance in a fun environment
- ✦ International teachers and performers give master classes, bringing fresh ideas and choreography into the studio
- ✦ *Dancefest* offers workshops and rehearsals for a performance at the historic Palace Theatre.





*PC Dancers With Heart*

**Feature**  
**Dancers With Heart**  
**"Leaps ~ Love ~ Leadership"**

**By: Acadia Davis**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Janine Romagnoli**  
**Canyon Crest Academy**

**I**n seventh grade, I joined the National Charity League. I loved the volunteer opportunities it offered, especially an event where they partnered with The Autism Tree Project to provide adaptive dance classes. However, meeting the requirements took much work to balance with my competition schedule. In the summer of 2023, I envisioned creating a volunteer organization just for teen dancers where we could spread joy in our community through our passion for dance. I shared my idea with a friend and fellow dancer, Maya Nagle, and we formed Dancers With Heart.

By January 2024, we had selected four more dancers to complete our Teen Board: Eleanor Moscato as Treasurer, Chelsea Miller as President-Elect & VP of Public Relations, Zoe Jackel as VP of Philanthropy, and Maya Almog as Secretary and VP of Programs. With support from our "shadow" Adult Board, we filed for a 501(c)(3) status and began reaching out to local philanthropies to see who might be interested in our offerings.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. We connected with The Autism Tree Project, Friendship Circle San Diego, Senior Centers, and Jewish Family Services to provide free dance classes. We also established connections with global organizations for our dancewear donation efforts, including a ballet school in Haiti.

Our members contribute to the community by choreographing dances we perform or teach (adaptively when needed) for our philanthropy partners. We also collect, sort, and distribute dancewear donations. In addition, there are leadership opportunities for our members, including serving on the Teen Board and participating in our donation and choreography committees.

We opened our membership drive in May 2024 and received eleven applications, bringing our total to 17 high school members. On October 5th, we kicked off our inaugural year, inspiring fellow teen dancers to use their love of dance to uplift our community. The "Kick-off" event featured the collection of costumes and cloth donated by West Coast Dance Complex, a studio in Carmel Valley.







*PC Transformación Ballet*

As directed, deserving organizations received these local and international contributions. One special note: *Transformación Ballet* in Guatemala, which empowers orphaned children through dance, was an international recipient. Dance Fairies and the Seaside Arts Center, a local studio that offers transformative arts education regardless of financial circumstances, also received funds.



*PC Dancers With Heart*

We have an exciting lineup of upcoming events, including adaptive dance classes in collaboration with Friendship Circle SD, The Autism Tree Project, and the Jewish Family Services Safe Parking Program. We are set to hold performances and adaptive classes for seniors at assisted living facilities, further extending our community reach.

I am proud to have started an organization that nurtures compassion, social responsibility, and leadership among its members, promoting a lifelong commitment to service. It is gratifying to work with our Teen Board Members, who are enthusiastic about our mission and eager to engage our members in meaningful volunteer and leadership opportunities.

I look forward to serving with Dancers With Heart in the coming years to leave a legacy for young dancers to prove that dance is indeed a powerful force for good.

Check out the site:

<https://www.dancerswithheart.org/>



*PC Dancers With Heart*

*Feature*

*Embracing Ballet Brown ~ More than Peach!*

*By: Bellen Woodard*

*CEO/Founder, More than Peach®*

*Sponsor/Advisor: Elizabeth Boehnlein*

*Dance Academy of Loudoun*



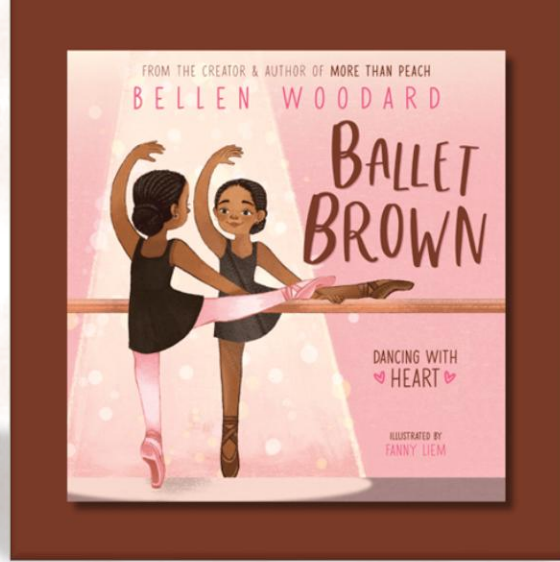
*All PC Bellen Woodard*

*My experiences and willingness to take risks have broadened my story and ideas about what I want to do in the years to come ~, and I am only 13!*

**A**s far back as I can remember, at school, starting in my first year, something strange would happen when my classmates and I were coloring. Kids would ask, "Can you pass me the skin-color crayon?" when they meant the "peach" color. Everybody did it. By the time I reached third grade, I was still puzzled when hearing that language. I told my mom what I witnessed and that I had to act.

She suggested that the next time a child asked for a "skin-color" crayon, give them brown ~ *my skin color*. But that did not feel right. My point was that we should put ourselves in other people's shoes. So, I asked the classmate to clarify which color they wanted, given the beautiful possibilities. My idea caught on. My teacher picked up my language, and the children did the same.





Soon, the whole school asked, "Which skin color do you mean?" When I heard that echo, I knew I must make a difference in my community ~ and even beyond. And I did.

As a curious kid, I wanted to dig deeper to understand the origins of our language. I researched and learned that years ago, Crayola labeled its peach-colored crayon as "flesh." So, of course, people used this language built into the product's history. I wanted to start anew and create a history of understanding and inclusion to represent different, equally beautiful young people. And I wanted to make this representation accessible to kids everywhere. Launching my company when I was eight, "*More than Peach*," I began developing traditional and inclusive skin-color crayons.



My classroom interactions taught me important lessons, including attention to deficits in other spaces. We should question the status quo and push for things to be better ~ for everyone, not just one group. A significant goal is this: next, I want to change Ballet's visual and verbal language of color.

I spend many of my after-school hours dancing. Ballet has also been a passion of mine since I was two years old. But soon after Starting with the dance, I questioned why everything in Ballet was so pink. Pink is a beautiful color, one of my favorites, and at the start of it all, I just accepted that wearing pink leotards, tights, and shoes was a suitable rule for any studio ~ it was undoubtedly the expectation of everyone I had known. But as I did with crayons at school, I wondered why and questioned why pink felt so limiting. I realized that "ballet pink" is just another version of the "skin color" crayon—a single term created only for some but packaged as intended for everyone.

When my white teammates wear pink, the visual of their bodies, clothes, and shoes all flowing together ~ is part of the reason, part of the elegance of Ballet. But I do not experience the same effect when I wear pink. The color that makes me feel most prepared when I dance is brown, so I decided to wear brown. But I also decided to give it its distinct name: Ballet Brown.

I would be the only one wearing brown for years because the studios did not do enough to invite and welcome it. But I did anyway ~ even as a tiny girl. And my parents and I had

conversation after conversation with studio owners and made hard choices. Now, more dancers I see daily wear tights and shoes that match their skin tones. Dancers I know who do not identify as Black or Brown understand why. Gratefully, the studio has revised our dress codes and policies due to our united efforts to acknowledge diversity.

There is so much that still needs to change for dancers. Finding tights, shoes, ribbons, and thread-complementing colors is complex, and that is just the start. When I ordered my first pair of brown pointe shoes two years ago, they were so scarce that they took ages to arrive ~ and by the time they finally did, my feet had already grown into a new size. My mom recently tried to buy new tights for me during a big event online, but she could only find "nude" and "ballet pink" (there are those words again, and of course, the tights described were a pale peach or soft pink we have been taught to associate with Ballet).

My work is about "letting kids be kids" and giving them their best options. We need better-suited options for all dancers. Our studios must also update their dress codes and connect young dancers' families with the reasoning behind the colors we wear.

"Ballet brown" means deeply to me ~ it is the title of my latest book. It stands for a range of colors, not a single shade, which speaks to the

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*As told to Lucy Feldman, with NHSDA edits  
October 11, 2024, TIME100 VOICES.  
Shared with permission.*

*Learn more about More than Peach®:  
<https://www.morethanpeach.com/>*

richness of dance. Like ballet pink, it is a term we can all consider and use positively. It represents awareness and a growth mindset. It stands on its own or right beside ballet pink. Ballet brown fills a void with self-acceptance and joy, calling to action to celebrate all dancers, valuing all our natural beauty precisely as we are. Would you prefer to color yourself with a peach crayon if you are brown? If not, why wear pink tights and shoes regarding day-to-day dance attire?

Just as there is no one way a ballet dancer must look great, there is also no one way to create change. I am proud of the difference I made as a "crayon activist," ~ and I am excited to keep growing and setting new goals. Right now, I want to be a teacher, a lawyer, or perhaps President someday, but no matter what path I take, I know I'll be using my voice. More than anything else, I will be a voice for an inclusive generation that sees and celebrates all people for who they are with the humility to learn from others.

It should not be surprising that anyone can devise a great idea to improve the world. We deserve to live our best life while doing it.





## **Feature**

### ***The Dancer's Voice Must Not Be Censored***

**By: Arianna Green**

***Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award***

***Sponsor/Advisor: Rebecca Moyer***

***The Lehigh Valley Charter High School  
for the Arts***

***My solo "Censored" originally intended to bring attention to the injustice of the Advanced Placement Psychology ban. I was appalled at the governor's ability to proclaim that the college board-issued class violated Florida's laws. Due to educators' protests, he retracted his order a few days later. However, the school districts' ability to remove such a significant course in the first place simply because the content examined the history of sexuality and gender identity is an abuse of power and speaks volumes about our society.***

***I spoke up about this injustice the only way I knew how ~ art. For years, offenders have colluded to censor information about the past to support their single narrative. As I dove deeper into the choreographic process, the piece's meaning broadened, and my dance evolved as the voice for all truths skewed to support bigoted ideals and hatred.***

***Stigmas in the dance community focused on a long tradition supporting a slanted narrative forced my movement. For instance, Ballet has been deemed the root of all dances, which is not true as many cultural genres share little technique or aesthetics with the classical style of European origins. There is also a belief that Hip-Hop dancers need to improve at or***



*PC Arianna Green*

***should never perform Ballet. In "Censored," I challenged both stigmas by incorporating balletic elements and House steps in my contemporary piece.***

***The one challenge I confronted was my audience, many of whom gratefully and quickly appreciated the interdisciplinary focus within my message. However, one teacher critiquing my solo recommended it be revised as more of a "concert" style, or the selection committee might not accept it for my school's main stage show. In one deep breath, the nonbiased group appreciated and accepted my original work.***

***"Censored" is meant to destroy single narratives and highlight the beauty of authenticity.***

## **Feature**

### **"Our Earth"**

**By: Hannah Li**

**Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award**

**Sponsor/Advisor: Kathryn Rediers**

**Cranbrook Kingswood Upper School**

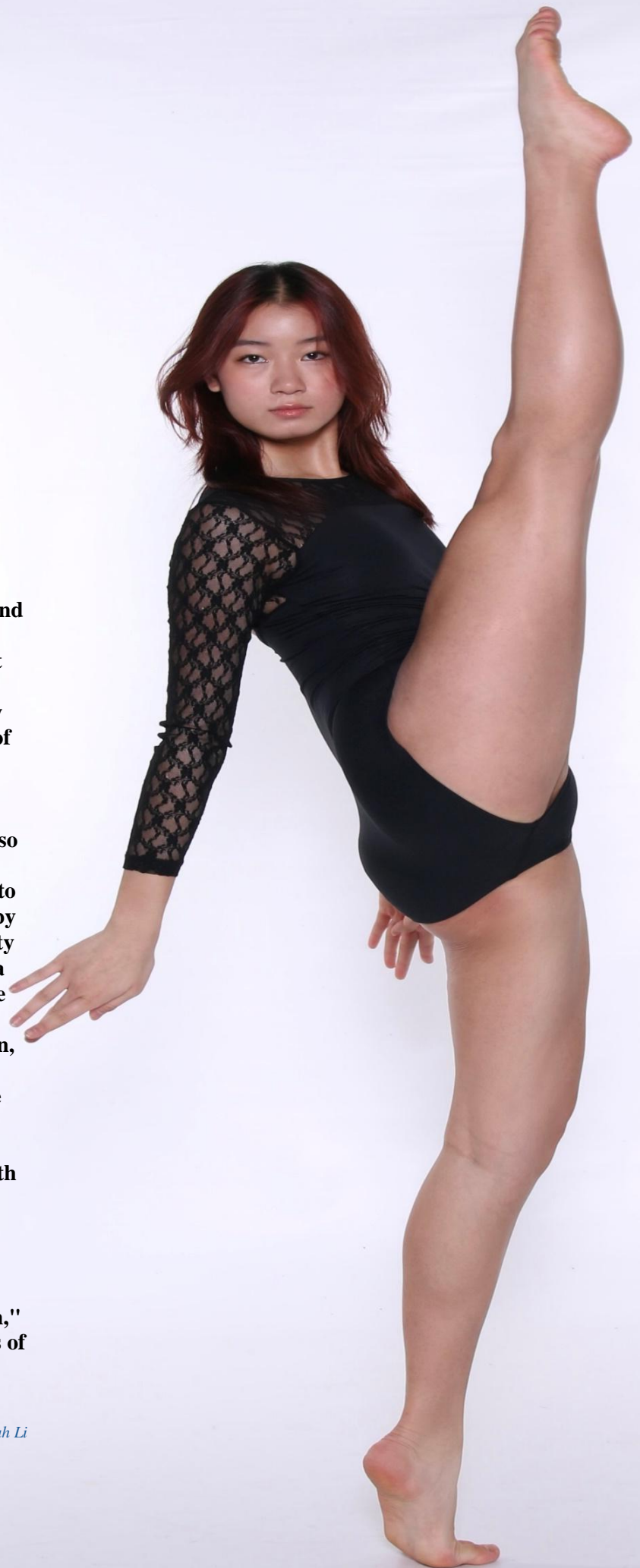
**Finally**, after 13 years, I again strolled the streets of Kunming, China. The familiar scents filled my olfactory senses, reviving joyful experiences in clear skies and vast landscapes. However, each memory now lacked prominent aspects: an orange sky, hitting record air-quality index numbers, and mass-produced products on every street. I came across poet IN-Q's spoken poetry just days later and immediately knew I would create a dance to his poetry that beautifully describes and captures the adverse effects of human actions ~ and inactions ~ on our Earth.

I had never choreographed or improvised, so this challenge was utterly unfamiliar yet stimulating. I began by adapting the poem to my desired rhythm and improvising piece by piece. Although insecure about my creativity at the time, since I had never given myself a chance to be free with expression, my dance titled "*Our Earth?*" came together quickly.

I rehearsed daily to perfect every repetition, swing, sharp and soft movement, and emotion. I wanted the viewers to empathize with our Earth and even consider their contributions to our climate. I wanted the viewers to remember the words of IN-Q with each movement I made.

After weeks of creating and rehearsing, I showed the piece to my sister, the dancer I admire most. She was proud of "*Our Earth,*" a memorable dance that spreads awareness of climate inaction and its devastating consequences.

*PC Hannah Li*





## Feature

### RDT Sojourn Concert Critique

#### Triumph through United Effort

By: Makella Bergeson

Advisor/Sponsor: Rachel Swenson  
Idaho Fine Arts Academy



PC Makella Bergeson

#### Dance Concert: *Sojourn*

Choreographers: Tyler Schnese (*Unset*), Cherylyn Lavagnino (*Triptych*),  
Natasha Washington (*Say Their Names*)

Dancers: Ursula Perry, Lauren Curley, Elle Johansen, Daniel Do,  
Jonathan Kim, Lindsey Faber, Meagan O'Brien, Caleb Daly, and Jacob Lewis

Lighting Design: Pilar 1

Music: Roisin Murphy (*Unset*), Scott Killan (*Triptych*), Samuel Barber (*Hold*), Max Richter  
and Luca D'Alberto (*Say Their Names*)

Costumes: Christopher Larson, Tyler Schnese, and Natosha Washington

**R**epertory Dance Theatre (RDT) is a professional company in Salt Lake City, and its concert *Sojourn* was a gift to watch! *Sojourn*, meaning "a temporary stay," was beautiful, with interwoven contrasting pieces. In this review, Edmund Feldman's *Four-Step Technique of Art Criticism* is the model for evaluating the concert's overall success.

The first episode, titled *Unset*, opened in a down pool upon a trio, one dancer jumping, the others entirely still. Another trio entered, matching the previous movement; the choreography continued as dependent shapes with partnering weight changes. The dancers melted to the floor while the music suddenly emerged busy and upbeat. The timing was on point as they circled each other in immaculate contemporary and ballet movements. The music then shifted, making them react in small, sharp, intricate, repeated shapes, jumping to complete the piece on the floor.

This section was clean, keeping the audience entertained and anxious for more. A nice touch introduced an early trio, then another, separated from each other until united into one group. The well-thought-out choreography coordinated with the musical

timing changes. However, the overall interpretation took time to decipher.

The dancers' relationships metamorphosed as they repeated dependent shapes, trading their weight in each other's hands throughout the musical excerpts. They did well here because they knew how to execute the moves. If the choreographer wanted the meaning to be known literally to the audience, he should have made it more transparent. Overall, the piece satisfied this reviewer.



In the following piece, *Triptych*, the cast included two duets accompanied by soloist Lauren Curley. The dance commenced in these groups, revolving around scooping and flicking, with tempo and weight changes. Lifts turned into walking while Lauren performed beautifully alone. More dancers entered, all in long, light-toned dresses. The organization did not necessarily stand out, but it was fine. The choice of soloing for so long was wise because it gave the audience a contrasting taste from watching the whole group on stage. Emotion shone through each dancer, which enhanced the conveying of meaning. The soloist generated a feeling of loneliness, of being distressed or heartbroken, as the two duets left her. The dancers, especially Lauren, triumphed in their interpretation. Her performances were stunning, intertwined alone or with the group. This set triumphed, with credit to the understanding between the ensemble and choreographer.

*Hold* began with the dancers in a small group; the lighting and costumes made them glow ~ suddenly, a sharp blackout. As a man spoke short word phrases, they moved, then froze into several shapes. Side lighting revealed them in neutral-colored pedestrian clothes, traveling in duets and trios. Proceeding, one duet appeared in the center while the rest were in the back. The orchestra's music was then intense as all were in a duo, executing partner work. The piece ended with the dancers running off stage and back on, pulling the curtain.

As purposely composed, the organization seemed chaotic in *Hold* but entertained with moments the viewers had never experienced. The touches of musical changes and blackouts were unexpected ~ but exciting; the interpretation constantly varied in such a complex piece. A sense of being in the present evolved through immediate changes in response to the music while the partners actively observed each other in their duets. This unique choreography was delightful and an audience favorite.

The finale, *Say Their Names*, embodied the whole RDT company. Snow-like material fell from the sky onto the beautiful soloist Ursula Perry. She ran, reaching dramatically to find a spotlight downstage. She then performed sharp, significant, vigorous movements as more dancers entered. The soloist was soft and emotional in the center, while the others were quick with powerful movements around her. A group member then touched and pulled her from the floor. An unexpected blackout occurred when the accompaniment reverted to loud, random noises. The dancers reappeared in their long white dresses, using musicality to perform sharp, slight, quick movements. The music drastically changed once again to a full orchestra. The dancers stomped, then connected as the dance ended.

This piece was well thought-out and exciting. The abrupt changes in music and the dancers matching its tone fulfilled what my artistic mind sought. My favorite part was the first blackout after the solo. Going from intense and emotional to pure abstract sounds was brilliant; however, the overall interpretation took time to find. This piece possessed variations due to the diverse music and choreography; its meaning appeared cold, with its atmospheric changes as a recurring theme. Although hard to understand, the dance still thrived.





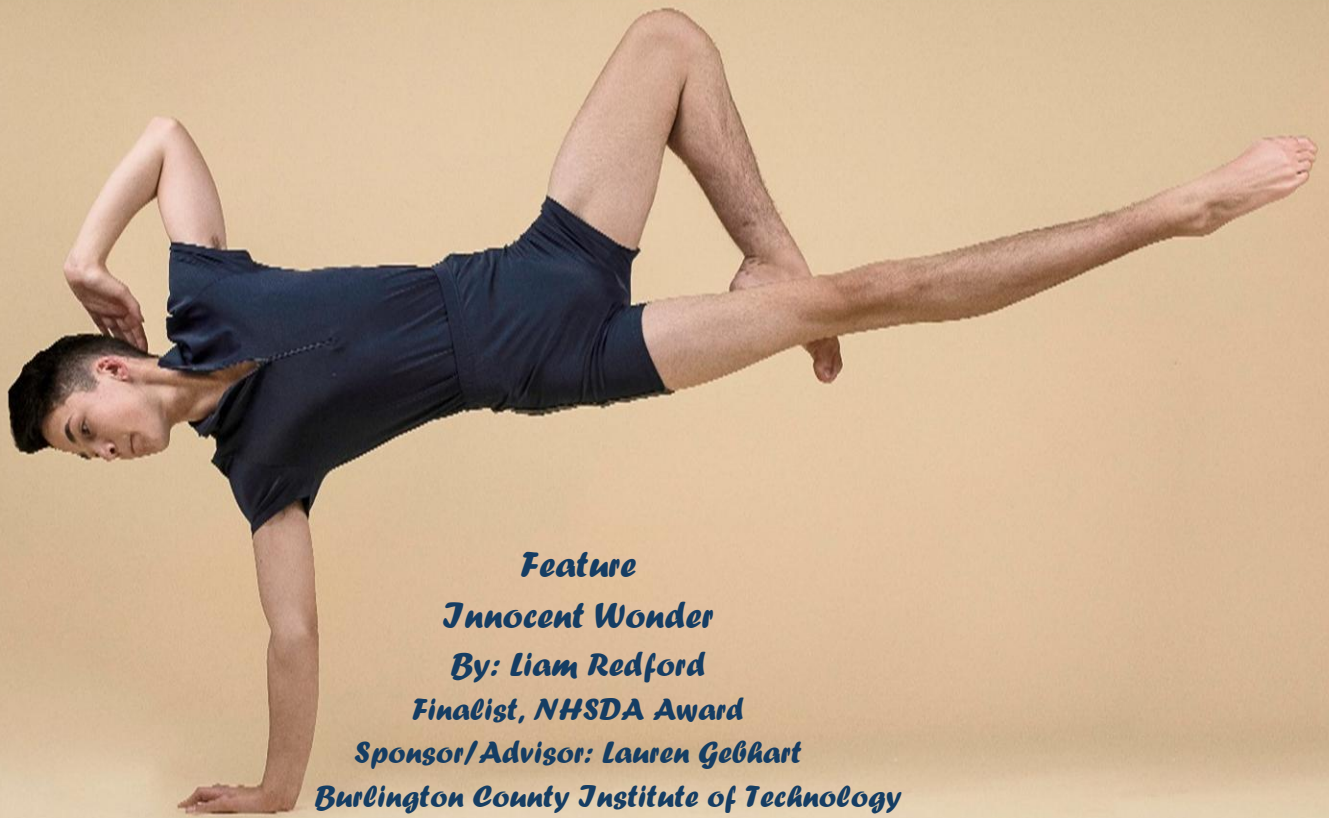
was unique and enjoyable. This piece will stay with the audience, haunting them as they continue watching other concerts. Repertory Dance Theatre's *Sojourn* was a stunning, memorable work of art.

With Edmund Feldman's Four-Step Technique of Art Criticism as my model, I concluded that the concert triumphed

through its professionalism, outstanding artists, and choreography. The costumes, lighting design, and music choices completed the experience, and the audience hoped to attend more of their work in the future!



All Performance Photos: Repertory Dance Theatre.  
PC: Sharon Kain.



***Feature***

***Innocent Wonder***

***By: Liam Redford***

***Finalist, NHSDA Award***

***Sponsor/Advisor: Lauren Gebhart***

***Burlington County Institute of Technology***

*PC Liam Redford*

***I*** wanted to ask, “Where does our wonder disappear when our childhood imagination fades?” Humans grow up so fast that we lose the wonder that makes children unique. Studies even show that 50% of adults forget how to skip. Why do we stop asking, “*Why, playing pretend and believing?*”

After this performance, I loved learning people’s interpretations in their imaginations within the moments of silence, as of their mother, someone they lost, and my original thought ~ an imaginary friend. I feel my childhood faded faster than most because of the development of my sexuality as an LGBTQ+ person. On a deeper level, this piece was my reflection on developing my identity as a queer youth, facing challenges of

isolation, rejection, and confusion within the immediate community.

Through this process, I learned to let go of the controlling factors in my habits and allow the choreography to flow much more organically. I did not want to strive for perfection but rather explore storytelling and living in these three minutes of wonder that others too often demand we unlearn. I am proud of changing my habits as a dancer, from moving “too big” to focusing on intimate, small moments.

Overall, I am incredibly grateful for the growth I have experienced during this process. In 20 years, I hope to see the world through the lens I created in this work and hold on to this magnificent, innocent wonder, sharing it with others.





All PC Isabella Gorecki

## *Feature*

### *"Cybernetic" ~ Absorbed into AJ*

*By: Isabella Gorecki*

*Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award*

*Sponsor/Advisor: Lori Vasquez*

*Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts*

**M**y piece "Cybernetic" intends us to feel absorbed into a lucid dream or virtual reality. All one can think of symbolically wearing a blindfold is how loose and free the body reacts to music blasting in a pitch-dark room with no one around. Moving forward, one senses more and more people are in the same situation; the thought comes to mind, "I like the way I am right now." By the end, the dancer snaps into reality as a different person ~ but cannot exactly remember why or what just happened.

Dancing has played a similarly significant role in my life by helping define my personality. From the first time I set foot into a studio, I became intrigued with the capacity to convey stories and emotions, learning how to influence people and communities positively. Although I come from the competition world, I have been in professional Ballet for the past two years, performing with Ballet Frontier. I love ballet's strong work ethic and discipline, as well as its intense rehearsals and training.

Since this is a collaborative art form, cooperation, trust, and teamwork are crucial. My experiences with dancers and choreographers have taught me valuable lessons about communication, reaching a

compromise, and the effectiveness of effort. This impact extends far beyond the confines of the studio. Shaping my perspective motivates positive, empathetic change. I have been involved in the dance world long enough to know that incredible dancers often lose this love due to situations with negative people who attempt to inhibit their desired profession in the arts.

While choreographing, I had trouble transitioning my movement to feel fluid and transparent, as if I were acting cybernetic. My goal was to utilize my space, time, and energy for a full effect from the audience's point of view. I wanted to demonstrate how it feels to be in a lucid dream, stepping away from reality, unaware of what is happening in the surroundings.

This choreographic experiment has made me conscious of my behavior and surroundings. I now realize that my world encompasses more than cybernetics but actual reality. I understand the need for tenacity, dedication, and overcoming obstacles to accomplish my goals. I accept and encourage my pupils, teammates, and less experienced dancers to resist artificial or temporary setbacks to ensure that all have a positive outlook on life.

*A Lucid Dream or Reality?*







## ***Feature***

### ***Bharatanatyam: Expressing the World's Tragedies and Triumphs***

***By: Kushi Hebblar***

***Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award***

***Sponsor/Advisor: Akhilandeshwari Vasudevamurthy  
Kalagangothri Foundation***

*All PC Kushi Hebblar*

**I** am blessed to live in a safe, happy home with a loving family who offers me plenty to eat and the luxury of turning up the thermostat for warmth. However, over 400 million children are in dire circumstances. At 12 years old, I accidentally encountered a Red Cross report about a young girl living in the Middle East. It showed her crying over the dead body of her parents and tending to her baby brother, who was only a few weeks old. Overcome with intense emotions, I curled into a ball and wept. I had heard of such horrors before, but only at that moment did I feel the weight of the issue. For months, this thought lingered in my mind. How can some people live peacefully or be cruel while others suffer? How can one end this suffering? The simplest solution is the best in this situation ~ Love, which keeps us human with the feeling we all crave. As a *Bharatanatyam* dancer, I decided to choreograph a piece to spread this message most effectively.

*Bharatanatyam* is an Indian classical dance form emphasizing the "*Satvika Abhinaya*" or raw emotion. The stylized, unique hand gestures, or *mudras*, make it possible to tell complex stories. In my choreography, I depict one of human suffering and war. I preach non-violence through the words of Buddha himself. In this way, I express this situation's urgency for love and peace.

I cannot identify one moment dance has impacted my life because it is my life. My earliest memories are running through class

around the older students, seeing the colors swirl across the fiery stage, and watching my parents tell stories within their movements. Dance has been my defining feature for over 16 years. I am from an artistic background, as my parents are dancers. It is more than an activity; it is where I spent countless childhood hours and made my sweetest memories with my friends ~ more than anything, it is the basis of my family's existence.

My parents bonded over their love of dance, which continues to tie them together. Moreover, my passion for this art form derives from theirs, which helps me be closer to my culture. Although I am too American for some and too Indian for others, dance bridges my Indian heritage to my life in America, shaping my personality irrevocably.

*Bharatanatyam* helps one de-stress and thoroughly absorb the moment. Its greatest works are mythological teachings of empathy for humankind, tapping into raw emotions performed within clean lines and a beautifully expressive vocabulary. Symbolic interpretations connect my roots and open my heart to empathize more with distressed innocents across lands.

I wish to help children overcome daily challenges by teaching dance as a coping method, letting them know they are loved. Moreover, I want people to embrace this ancient art form, which expresses the tragedies and triumphs of the world.

*Children like the girl  
in my composition  
should not suffer ~  
but be blessed to  
Dance and live Joyfully.*







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*PC Dancers With Heart*

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