Dance Arts Now!

The official Junior/Secondary NHSDA Newsletter
Spring Edition 2021
Let us float through Spring ~ dancing! As pictured beautifully here, we will celebrate our creative awakening throughout this season and beyond!

Content:
- Poem ~ Painting ~ Short Story
- Viewpoint ~ News
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Note: All group photos were taken prior to the COVID-19 shutdown. Our NHSDA chapters take everyone’s health and safety seriously.
“Home”
By: Katherine Wu
Advisor/Sponsor: Tiffany Van Cleaf
Adlai E. Stevenson High School
All PC Katherine Wu

Dressed in a glowing retro “open” sign, 
Red as the Flamin’ Hot Cheetos devoured, 
Blue as the Glacier Freeze Gatorade guzzled 
It alights as the school day ends.

The French door sways, 
It delightfully dings, 
A barrier and a bridge. 
Connecting yet isolating the dance dimension 
From the rest of humanity.

Feet shuffle, 
Flip flops smack, 
Gym shoes get discarded.

Her soft footsteps fade, 
Outrageous laughter overtakes her, 
More deeply into the building.

The dressing room door creaks open, 
Some girls are chuckling, 
Spitting their chips, 
A few even snort 
Fondly labeled pigs.

She welcomes the smell of Aussie hairspray, 
Of Tasty Spin’s caloric fries. 
Of unavoidable salty sweat, 
Because this is what she can recognize.

Older girls are pulling on their 
Well-worn satin shoes. 
Like slipping on soft cotton PJs, 
Dancers feel at home.
Five minutes till,  
Their covered feet clack,  
Against the linoleum hallway,  
Hours later the frigid ground  
Revives their throbbing, sweaty toes.

As the group gathers in the hall,  
Their chatter dwindles to a whisper,  
Studio C’s wooden door swings open its arms  
As a mother does to her children.  
She ushers the girls away from the cold,  
Welcoming them into  
The warmth of the love-filled home.
She had always dreamed of being a ballerina, and finally, her dream was coming true. Stage lights were shining brightly, and all eyes were upon her. This was her moment.

Yet, she was often found in the back of her ballet class, feeling outshone by all her peers. She would compare herself to such amazing ballerinas around her. She loved ballet but never thought it was her strong style; she felt she was not good enough to be the dancer she really wanted to become.

One day, after so long hiding in the last line, she resolved to transform herself. She was tired of feeling as if she was not the best, and she now wanted to change that. For many hours she would focus on improving her technique, strengthening her feet, improving her flexibility. She was determined to prove to everyone ~ including herself ~ that she could become an incredible ballerina. This all helped her gain confidence, and she knew she would no longer be stuck in the back row.

Slowly but surely, she built significant improvements in all aspects of her dancing. Everyone was impressed with how much progress she had made, as her dance teachers and friends cheered her on every step of the way. The road was not easy, but finally, her hard work paid off, and she was given the lead role in her upcoming ballet performance.

She had the most beautiful red tutu and red pointe shoes to match. Although she was extremely nervous before the performance, her classmates gave some encouraging words, which helped calm her nerves. As the lights illuminated, she stepped onto the stage, with confidence.

The music commenced, and she knew this would be her shining moment. She lit up the stage with her bright personality and amazing presence. Every audience member watched in awe, shocked by her elegance and ability to fill the entire auditorium with deep passion. At that time, she felt she was truly on top of the world.

Afterward, several teachers and classmates showered her with sincere compliments and kind words. She was so proud of her performance, for she knew this was just the beginning…

There would be many more incredible performances in her future.
Starting at a young age, dance has been an imperative aspect of my life, and now, as a Senior, I realize my passion. I have explored various styles ~ contemporary, lyrical, jazz, ballet, and hip-hop ~ but have always preferred the faster, sharper movements. I express myself and portray a story through motion as a gift that merges with music, bonding lifelong relationships with those in the audience who share an identical love for the sport.

I acquired much of my dance knowledge at the Take Flight Dance Center, where choreographers possessed a strong work ethic. As a team member, I helped make the studio victorious at multiple competitions. And when my name was called as the "Most Dedicated Dancer" at an annual recital, joy rushed through me. With my commitment recognized, I was motivated to continue practicing so to achieve my dreams. I recall the proud look on my mother’s face and how honestly grateful I was for her continued sacrifice supporting my artistic journey.

There is no more incredible feeling than uniting as a team to accomplish related goals and ambitions on the dance floor, creating family-like connections that last for years to come. Being a part of the Ridge Dance Department since my Sophomore year has enhanced my high school experience. I have competed on the Ridge Varsity Dance Team and participated in the Ridge Dance Collective. I am grateful for what the department offers for dancers within this environment. I have made remarkable memories and built confidence that these formed friendships will continue following graduation. I especially thank Ms. Miranda for her guidance and trust so we could reach our potential.

Dancing is more than just enjoyable; it is a fantastic way to physically keep in shape with a creative mental mindset. There are even more benefits, including:

- improved condition of the heart and lungs,
- better coordination,
- flexibility,
- agility,
- and strength.

Throughout these years, dance has helped me accumulate a healthy yet competitive personality, motivating me to work hard and strive for greatness.

Never for the world would I trade those magical moments on stage. I am so thankful for the positive experiences and inspiring people I have met along the way.
The Dance Corner in Connecticut offers community opportunities for its NHSDA members with the goal: “We provide a safe, positive learning atmosphere for our children to grow and flourish.”

The Performance Team invites dancers who want challenges in class, rehearsal, concerts, and competitions; each level supports specific ages, promoting teamwork and confidence. Another opportunity is the Student Teacher Education Program, which trains teens to become successful educators. Dancers also perform in a “Dancing from the Heart” show to benefit Child Life at Yale-New Haven Hospital and “Winter Follies” to benefit Toys for Tots.

Students and staff nominate Champions for their pure kindness within the studio family. Notes director Carrie Smith: “The smallest act of kindness puts a smile on someone’s face for a whole day. Although the pandemic has made it difficult to collect deserving names, we are adapting by celebrating them on social media, and we encourage our young dancers to follow this golden rule wherever they are: Let us keep spreading the love!”
Check Your Calendar this Spring!

Dance A Difference Week!
March 7th ~ 13th
Thank A Dance Teacher Day!
May 6th
Day of Recognition & Senior Slideshow
June 9th

In March, NDEO invites our NHSDA chapters to celebrate “Dance A Difference Week” ~ dedicated to dance-based service within our communities!

And in May, “Thank A Dance Teacher Day” spotlights our great teachers who inspire our students through quality dance education!

Plus, NDEO hosts the “Day of Recognition” for all NHSDA inductees to post their photos with the hashtag#NHSDA2021Dance ~ and graduating members are welcome to participate in the Senior Slideshow honoring them!

Learn more: https://nhsda-ndeo.org

Laredo School of Contemporary Dance presents a sweet Father-Daughter Night where families enjoy dancing with laughter, creating crafts and sharing pizza. A keepsake photo captures this magical night under the moon and stars....

All PC Laredo School of Contemporary Dance
Congratulations to Jennifer Aversa for earning this NDEO Award!

Ms. Aversa has performed with Towson University and professional companies and teaches in the Baltimore/Washington DC area. She mentors her students in a non-competitive, service-based program at Dance Connections, Inc., where she encourages them to perform for nursing home residents, in local schools, at half-time athletic events, and in fundraisers that support the community. And dancing with the Columbia Orchestra in their annual Nutcracker and Young Artist concerts is another wonderful opportunity for her students.

Ms. Aversa and her team build strong dancers in technique, academics, and service:

“We mentor our students so they can express their ideas as they master their movement skills…sharing with the community. All children can be successful as they enjoy dancing throughout their lives. Our classroom approach is to safely teach serious dancing in a fun, nurturing environment as a close, expanded family!”

All PC Dance Connections, Inc.
Due to Covid-19, our New Studio of Dance staff created unique programs to connect virtually, which evolved into analyses of dancers’ experiences in racial inequalities and how to overcome this chasm.

Over a 12-week journey this fall, our students:
- read and discussed ballerina Misty Copeland’s book *Life in Motion*,
- researched racial inequalities,
- interviewed a member of our studio’s professional company who has dealt with racial inequality in dance, and
- discussed ways to make changes for future dancers.

Throughout the project, we journaled into our insights amid new material. Here are our youths’ summaries.

**Maddy Peeples ~ “Equal Education”**
Many public schools do not have dance programs, or those existing are severely underfunded. This reality is especially true in disadvantaged communities. Some critics may argue they could attend a studio. However, in both rural and urban areas, many parents do not have the means to pay for private dance education. The following quote from the American Psychological Association shows the disparities due to poverty: “In the United States, 39% of African-American children and adolescents and 33% of Latino children and adolescents are living in poverty, which is more than double the 14% poverty rate for non-Latino, White, and Asian children and adolescents.”

While low-income areas may comprise more minorities, these kids are sadly not given a chance to take dance classes. Thus, there is less diversity in our field. To rectify this, we must provide funding for programs in disadvantaged communities to make our dance family more richly diverse.

**Bella Lindsey ~ “Beautiful Champions”**
Unfortunately, many influential dancers of color are not discussed or given the credit for their contributions to the art form. One who shone brightly was Pearl Primus (1919-1994), a dancer and choreographer who introduced traditional African and Caribbean dance to American audiences. She was a modern pioneer whose work paralleled big names like Martha Graham. Primus’ most powerful choreography exposed what she had witnessed ~ violent racism.

Another influential dancer was Raven Wilkinson (1935-2018), who in 1955 became the first woman of color to perform for a major classical company ~ Ballet Russe de Monte-Carlo. Due to the injustice of discrimination, she often faced danger when touring the segregated South; she eventually left her native United States to dance with the Dutch National Ballet.

These influential dancers who broke racial barriers and contributed so much to the dance world often do not receive the credit they earned. Sadly, too many young dancers do not know about them.

Clara Monts ~ “Alter-Realities”

Most people, even dancers, think of ballet when they think of dance. There are other popular genres, like lyrical or hip hop, but their first thought remains to be ballet. In our discussions, we have examined why this is the case.

Ballet originated in Europe around the 16th century. Since then, it has been recognized worldwide as the "classical style" because wherever Europeans traveled, they preserved this aesthetic. We may have been told ballet was the foundation for all styles, but this is not necessarily true. It tends to be accepted as the starting point when learning dance, but it must not be the only requirement and other forms should be experienced.

Open Minds inspire

To correct this narrow view, we must promote many genres of dance. One way to do this as a dance student is to request to take multiple types of classes. It is also a good idea to encourage our dancers to research a new style they would like to learn. Some alternatives are African or Latin dance. And when learning specific cultural dances, it is vital to study directly with a master teacher in the related culture.

Remember to be open to new types of dance and to encourage others to participate along the way.
The piece I created, "Wings," is a culmination of how I feel currently in my life and of dance, while passing through those points where they intercept. I created the movement keeping in mind the idea of soaring through the skies. I needed to command these wings to take off and achieve my goals.

Creating this choreography, I was inspired by many elements, the main being the music. When I first found the song, I instantly connected to it but was worried it sounded too feminine for a male dancer. However, as I listened more carefully, I realized as a dancer and choreographer…

To push myself, I must create work that challenges not only physically but emotionally.

Confidence is something that I have struggled with before and being comfortable as myself has been difficult. I want to grow and make myself the best I can be. Throughout the compositional process, I experienced the same struggles as any young artist. That “constant battle” feeling:

“Am I good enough to do this? Is this piece good enough?”

My concern related to what the piece meant in terms of doubting myself and lacking focus. I found as I connected more to the work, I was inspired to implement my feelings into the movements and to ultimately feel confident, content, with the outcome transforming into ~ my wings.
Choreographing with Sheet Music
By: Maximiliano Fernandez Escalona
Advisor/Sponsor: Christine Brooks
Apex Friendship High School

I want to dance
I want to gaze at the stars
I want to take a picture
At the end of the world
~ “Hero” lyric excerpt from Ghost Quartet, by Dave Malloy

One of my values as an artist is to constantly challenge myself and find new ways to incorporate my other passions into my art. I play several instruments, including piano, and had the idea to look through some of my old sheet music to discover something new to choreograph. I stumbled upon an old favorite, “Hero” from the song cycle “Ghost Quartet” by Dave Malloy. What I really love about this song is the complex rhythms and weird chords throughout, and there is a jazz improv section in the middle, which is always exciting to play.

Remembering how this song made me feel, I decided it would be the inspiration for my next choreography. I did my normal process: I danced as I listened to a recording and made note of movements that made sense. However, I found myself getting stuck halfway through the piece. After taking time to reflect, I concluded my process was the main problem.

Luckily, I had an additional resource this time around, the sheet music, so why not try using that to shape the movements? The song’s baseline is unique, so I experimented with the beat instead of the normal counts.

This changed the game for my creative process ~ something just clicked ~ and I successfully finished the choreography.

With every project, I analyze the final product. I made a huge change to my process, and normally I do not like change, but this time it worked! The sheet music was secretly a tool, which made me change my movements and helped me through a block within my creative process.

So maybe it is time for me to use sheet music to help me design movements in future projects?...

We will see!
My solo is a synopsis of a more extensive work-in-progress entitled:

"Standing on the Horizon."

In addition to my devotion to the arts, I carry an exuberant passion for social justice reform. As an advocate for better race relations, I observe how many people neglect genuine conversations ~ due simply to their discomfort. Grasping this as inspiration, I strive to evoke empathy throughout my community and beyond, to influence individuals before these necessary discussions cease.

My past pieces have encompassed diverse themes...My first illustrated feeling lost in a perilous time, as when my mother fell ill to cancer; my second illustrated how all people, regardless of social identity, have gone through similar emotions. Dance helped me overcome obsessions with comparisons to others and invest in exploring who I am... as a compassionate artist envisioning justice for all.

In a broader comparative analysis, my solo explores a momentous movement within the African American story that I must play an active part. Therefore...

While composing, I struggled to illustrate an entire community in one dancer, as much of the symbolism depicted in the more extensive work required multiple individuals. In the solo, however, I focused on the intensity and beauty of the African people, the glorification of success as determined by a controlling, racially-induced society, and the detriment caused by falling captive to a prescribed concept of success. Subsequently, as earlier described, I too have encountered parallel experiences challenging my sense of self, but I have learned to combat these obstacles and ~ to triumph.

I aspire to help others utilize dance as a catalyst for their voices by traveling to underserved high schools in my community, teaching the students how to invest in a genuine process to produce symbolic works reflecting their experiences. In college, I intend to major in sociology, with certificates in Dance and Values in Public Life, in preparation for a career as an attorney, community organizer, and nonprofit enthusiast. I will continue to choreograph works that stimulate insightful dialogue concerning personal and universal ideals ~ claiming our rightful place at the table of justice and equality.
Identity and awareness begin with what we know, so here it goes: My name is Megan Bader. I am an artist, dancer, and human, with an unfinished story. My solo “From Dark to Light” depicts my navigating through insecurity and anxiety. Its beginning illustrates the chaos and exhaustion that comes with a life filled with nervous energy, stress, and a lack of self-confidence.

I found inspiration from words that represent the feelings and experiences when anxiety is at its worst. With the increasing intensity of excessive self-criticism and negativity, I molded my movement to match these feelings. Reaching a breaking point, I had anxiety. Applying concepts related to softness and light, I connected movement to my new approach to life focused on: self-care creating a support system.

Since birth, dance has been my norm. Growing up a competition dancer, where the goals are to be “first overall” or execute thirty-two fouettés effortlessly, I always felt out of place. I knew I loved to dance, but never thought I was achieving my dream. Last year, when a severe injury occurred, I faced the decision to either eliminate or fight for dance.

Even at my lowest, I knew I had to keep dancing…. If I gave up, I would never forgive myself.

Over time, my recovery veered from just physical therapy. I surrendered to fixing something unrelated to my injury and to dissect the toxic effects that a lifetime of goal setting had left on my well-being. Throughout recovery, I began discovering more of who I am and why I dance in the first place ~ because I love it. Dance is my chosen language, whereby I most accurately portray myself. Like all art forms, it has no finality of perfection. By this truth, dance is a beautiful opportunity to keep growing.

My generation is often obsessed with hiding behind screens in attempts to escape vulnerable situations. Yet naturally I run towards these feelings because, ~ while they may scare me~ I feel so alive. Because honesty and dealing with relationships deeply inspire me, my work as an artist centers around telling stories that emotionally impact my audience.

Learning so much in dance, I want to give back by helping young dancers any way I can. Growing up a big sister to another dancer, I have strived to save her from feeling “less-than” or unworthy. To show
her everyone has a unique and welcoming place in the dance world and support her in her life’s travels, I dream of helping any younger dancer through challenges while pursuing something so technical, honest, physical, and demanding on the mind and body as dance. Through choreographing, I will tell stories that impact audiences.

By initially choosing to compose what was real for me, I had been grasping many personal expectations. That was precisely what I attempted to avoid, and I eventually worked through it. Towards the end, the choreography circled back to anxious feelings within a new perspective ~ releasing all inhibitions, leading to exploration without limitation. This experience has led to my growth as an artist and taught how to find confidence in my work.

In a way, my piece still feels incomplete because it is about a part of me that will never disappear, and it accurately reflects where I am currently in life. Still, I want to release these insecurities, to be free traveling the globe, connecting people with dance as a universal language because…

I am Megan Bader: an artist, dancer, and human, excited to further my journey, sharing, helping, and exploring.
Points of Contention
By: Anna Taravella
2020 Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award
Advisor/Sponsor: Elizabeth Mazurkiewicz
Spotlight Dance Works

My piece, titled Point of Contention, is representation of a constant internal conflict within my mind. The choreography was inspired by my struggle believing in myself. Often I am self-critical, which causes me to shut down and give up. When I do not understand something on the first try, I may not want to learn about it anymore. One small mistake in a dance, I become frustrated for the rest of the rehearsal.

Overall, my piece demonstrates my constant struggle with confidence.

Throughout the piece, the music’s volume and quality change frequently, like how my feelings towards myself fluctuate: sometimes I am confident and worry-free, but other times I am doubtful and discouraged. The choreography mimics these ups and downs through changes in dynamics and movement qualities.

There are various important motifs in this solo. My hands return to my heart many times throughout...this repetition emphasizes the connection to my thoughts and emotions. On some occasions this gesture has resistance, representing self-doubt and suppressing my abilities. Other times it is followed by large explosive movements, representing an outburst of confidence and passion. Another repeating idea is how one body part moves another. My hands pick my head up multiple times. This signifies me composing myself, preparing for what is to come. At other times, I push and pull away from my current focus, representing when I knock myself down, because I am usually the cause of my own worries.

This solo is about pushing through and overcoming those negative feelings, and growing as a person in the process.
Choreography Inspires Redemption
By: Stephany Santiago
2020 Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award
Advisor/Sponsor: Heather Warfel Sandler
County Prep High School

As a sophomore, I completely indulged in the art, even training over 20 hours a week outside of school. I was curious and wanted to speed up my growth process.

In the Present,
Moving Toward the Future
Dance is my expressive outlet both, and within only two years, it has become the one activity that makes me feel free and not afraid of the world. Each ounce of sweat is worth its weight in gold. When my feet touch the stage, I feel in my heart that this is where I am meant to be. When the heat from the stage lights beam into my skin, the world’s trials fade…I am safely in my room again, dreaming along with my stuffed animals.

Dance continues to transport me on my life’s journey. It is my engine, supplying the fuel to move through space, igniting a curiosity inside my mind. Because as a dancer I have developed a keen self-awareness, I want to help others understand their range of motion and strengths, and therefore, my goal is to become a physical therapist with a specialization in the dance field. I know dancers demand the most of their bodies, both physically and mentally. I will give back to the art form by helping dancers respect and take care of themselves.

From a young age, I had struggled to speak to others and feared defending myself against my tormentors. This made me feel small and uncomfortable in my own skin. “Redemption” is a solo depicting my passage to accept, thereby fully invest in and take control of my physical self. In resolve, this creative process would help me overcome any negative perception, while the connection between body and breath would play an important role toward my resilience through movement.

Looking Back
Despite childhood difficulties, there was comfort in solitude within my own world, even if that world only consisted of the stuffed animals in my bedroom. I enjoyed watching “Dance Moms,” and trying to copy every single step I saw. For an eight-year-old girl, it was a great show, so I taught myself to do cartwheels and splits like the TV dancers. Repeatedly begging my mom to enroll me in ballet class, the promise would somehow be delayed. Roughly six years later, as a high school freshman, I decided to become a dance major ~ with no ballet or modern dance experience. Although challenging to pick up choreography with technical terms, I never felt out of place. I figured, if I started from the bottom, there was only room to grow.

All PC Stephany Santiago
“Redemption”

*Analyzed & Realized*

I have felt trapped inside a box for most of my life, but my body is what I have control over. In this light, the solo begins and ends with delicate movements representing the moments when I feel relief from all negative thoughts.

The contrasts and dynamic changes represent chaos amid obstacles to self-love. I want the motive of reaching up to feel like a breath of fresh air as one steps closer to personal acceptance, and culminates with delicate movements that represent the moments of relief from all negative thoughts.

*A teacher told me that I am a “force to be reckoned with,” and this solo has helped me understand how I must love myself before anything else...In many ways, dance has saved my life. From this day forward, I will be resilient and ready to take on the world’s challenges ~ one deep breath at a time.*
Dance Arts Now!

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