



# Dance Arts

## Now!

*The official Junior/Secondary NHSDA Newsletter  
Holiday 2025  
Special "Dance & Cultural Understanding" Edition*



*PC Lincoln Park Performing Arts Charter School*



## ***Dance Arts Now!***

***The official Junior/Secondary NHSDA Newsletter  
Holiday 2025 ~ Special Dance & Culture Edition***



***"I believe that Dance came from the people, and that it should always be delivered back to the people." ~ Alvin Ailey***

***This holiday season, let's honor how dance mirrors our diverse cultures and through creative expression, we celebrate our love for the arts and humanity.***

***Table of Contents  
Free Verse & Viewpoints  
Good News & Features  
Holiday Greetings***



*Free Verse: Embodying Qualities*

*By: Camila Jsabel Pérez Rodríguez*

*Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award*

*Advisor/Sponsor: Teddy Talbot*

*New World School of the Arts*

*With Dance,  
I realize  
the importance of  
striving to be  
an inspirational artist,  
embodying qualities  
like kindness, equality,  
humility, and  
cultural understanding.*

*I believe  
It is crucial  
to work diligently  
with a selfless spirit,  
as we overcome any  
challenge that  
comes our way.*

*PC New World School of the Arts*





PC Idaho Fine Arts Academy

## Free Verse: Dave Eggar and Friends Residency Reflection

By: Amelia Koltonski

Advisor/Sponsor: Rachel Swenson  
Idaho Fine Arts Academy

During the Dave Eggar and Friends residency, we learned how their backgrounds influence their artistic work. We, the dancers, created choreography to the professional music, which is about the culture of the guest artists.

Tení Rane, a folk singer-songwriter, shared her original music inspired by life and nature in Tennessee.

We took the lyrics and music as inspiration to abstract into a contemporary dance.

The culture of our guests inspired the original music and dance.

One key point was,

How to listen to the music's tempo and adapt to it.

I also noticed many of my peers making responsible decisions, listening and taking critiques from the guest artists.

I learned responsible decision-making skills, as well ~ how to adjust to

a new performance space, being aware of the other dancers, and thus adjusting my movement...

Through this experience of abstracting lyrics and the meaning of a song to create choreography, we learned that culture could shape art.



PC Jordyn Barrett



**Viewpoint**  
**Connecting with Diverse Cultures**

**By: Jordyn Barrett**  
**Finalist, NHSDA Award**  
**Advisor/Sponsor: Amy Valerius**  
**North Fort Meyers High School**

**My** journey in dance began at the young age of three, and my passion blossomed from there. Throughout these years, I have realized dance offers me much more than a creative outlet; it has become a place of safety and a place to find joy, discipline, confidence, and connection with many cultures in the arts.

Dance has played a major role in my ability to connect with people from diverse backgrounds. Whether in a group workshop, master class, summer intensive, rehearsal, or performance, dancing has brought me into contact with like-minded individuals with varied backgrounds who share the same passion. It has allowed me to form deep friendships and build a strong sense of community.

Through dance, I have met people from many walks of life, and we are all blessed to have been united by a common love. The collaborative nature of various dance styles taught me how to work with others, communicate non-verbally, and be part of something larger than myself. These interactions have enriched my social life and given me a sense of belonging.

In conclusion, dancing has positively influenced my life in countless ways. It has fostered meaningful connections with others, and what began as a hobby has evolved into a fundamental part of who I am, shaping not only my body but also my mind and spirit. The transformative power of dance is something I will continue to embrace for my entire life.



# MICHAELA DEPRINCE TAKING FLIGHT



PC The DePrince Family

## Viewpoint

### Tribute to Michaela DePrince

By: Taylor Robinson

Advisor/Sponsor: Adriana Willis

Madison Middle School

*Dare to Dream, no matter what circumstances you are under, no matter how poor or sad you are at any given moment. Don't be afraid of living and loving. ~ Michaela DePrince*

**T**he beautiful Michaela DePrince broke down barriers by advocating for diversity in the ballet world. Born in Sierra Leone, West Africa, amid a war-torn environment, everything she held dear was taken from her; both her father and mother died when she was a young child. She witnessed horrific scenes and endured unimaginable horrors, such as her teacher being killed along with her unborn baby right in front of her.

Because the innocent girl's uncle believed that she and her mother were bad omens after his only son died following her mother's illness, he abandoned Michaela at an orphanage. The adult women in charge labeled her a witch and a devil due to her vitiligo skin condition.

Can you imagine a child who is orphaned, rejected by the last of her family, and called

the devil because of her appearance? Yet, her story did not end there.

While at the orphanage, something in the dirt caught little Michaela's eye: a crumpled picture of a pale dancer in pink, somewhat funny but pretty clothes, elevated onto her tiptoes. She decided this was what she must do, not knowing how or even what this dance was ~ just a pure dream.

Michaela's story blossomed when she was adopted by a loving family in America, the DePrinces. They believed in her and quickly enrolled her in petite ballet. Michaela faced challenges due to narrow-minded views. Being African, her body was considered "too muscular," her skin was "too dark," and with those white vitiligo marks on her neck, she could never succeed. Gratefully, she didn't let the doubters define who she was.

*Taking flight, ballerina Michaela DePrince proved to be uniquely brilliant.*

**Special Note:** We highly recommend Michaela's autobiography: *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina* (Ember Reprint Edition, 2016). Although we lost this beautiful dancer at the age of 29, her legacy lives on.





PC Ella Roberts

## **Viewpoint** **Self-Expression & Growth**

**By: Ella Roberts**

**Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award**

**Advisor/Sponsor: Genevieve Woodward**

**Ursuline Academy**



*Dance presents opportunities to meet people from diverse backgrounds, broadening our perspective and teaching us to appreciate different styles and cultures*

**D**ance has been a central part of my life, shaping who I am both inside and outside the studio. It has taught me discipline, teamwork, and perseverance, pushing me to set goals and work tirelessly to achieve them, whether mastering a new technique or choreographing a piece. Dance has also been my creative outlet, giving me a way to express emotions and tell stories when words fall short.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of my journey has been choreographing not only for myself, but also for others. I have loved creating pieces that others get to perform and share with the audience. Seeing my ideas come to life through other dancers and knowing that the audience connects with our work is an incredible feeling. It has shown me how powerful collaboration can be and how creativity can bring people together.

Outside the studio, dance has given me confidence and a sense of identity. Being part of a dance team has taught me the value of community and supporting others. In the future, I want to use dance to make a positive impact on others.

I hope to teach dance to younger students, showing them that it's not just about technique but also about self-expression and growth. My experience working with younger dancers has inspired me to pursue a degree in elementary education. I believe the skills I've developed, such as patience, communication, and the ability to make learning fun, will translate well to the classroom.

I'm excited to combine my passion for teaching with the lessons dance has taught me. I also want to use dance to connect with my community. Whether through organizing performances, volunteering at local events, or using dance to raise awareness for important causes, I believe it's a powerful way to bring people together. Dance has given me so much, and I'm excited to continue sharing its magic with others.



*Good News ~ Breaking News!*

***Leap to Great Heights!***

*The 2026 NHSDA Artistic Merit, Leadership, & Academic Achievement Scholarship applications are now open!*  
*Learn more: <https://www.ndeo.org/nhsda/Scholarship/NHSDA-Award>*  
*Application due date: January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026.*

*This year, thanks to fundraising efforts, the application fee is waived for all students. Awardees are invited to have their submitted writings published in "Dance Arts Now!," the official NHSDA newsletter.*

*PC Ashlinn Berger, NHSDA Award Winner 2025*





PC Ashlinn Berger

## Good News!

### The Perfect Gift!

Searching for the Perfect Gift  
for your  
NHSDA Member?

Check out the NHSDA  
Merchandise Shop:

<https://www.ndeo.org/nhsda/Merchandise>



PC NDEO/NHSDA

## Extra! Extra! Extra!

Link to NDEO's Blogs and  
upcoming events for super articles...  
<https://www.ndeo.org/Latest-News>

...Plus, the latest and past issues  
Of *Dance Arts Now!*, the official NHSDA  
newsletter filled with inspiring stories and  
illustrations created by our brilliant  
NHSDA members!

<https://www.ndeo.org/nhsda/Dance-Arts-Now>



All PC NDEO/NHSDA



## *Good News!*



*PC Dance Corner*

### *Irish Step!*

**T**he Dance Corner in Connecticut offers Irish Step dance classes, along with other styles, for boys and girls aged five and older.

Their beginner curriculum introduces foundational technique and soft shoe steps, emphasizing balance and musicality. Young students learn to count beats while enjoying the process. Advanced students focus on increasing strength and musicality as they master key elements of traditional Irish dance, using both soft and hard shoes.

### *Community Involvement & Dedication to Social Issues*

**A**ll for Dance in New Jersey is committed to community involvement by partnering with local charities, schools, and other related groups. These initiatives highlight their dedication to social issues while strengthening their leadership role. All for Dance reaffirms its ongoing pledge to apply their talents for the community's benefit and to promote a broader understanding by blending their love of dance with social responsibility and cultural awareness.



*PC All for Dance*



Mike Reid

PC Idaho Fine Arts Academy

## ***Good News!*** ***“Echoes of Compassion”*** ***Residency and Concert***

### ***Overview***

The Idaho Fine Arts Academy recently hosted its “Echoes of Compassion” residency and concert, welcoming guest musicians Dave Eggar, Phil Faconti, Levi Trent, and Teni Rane, with an impressive ballroom as the main stage.

### ***Purpose and Impact***

The program focused on encouraging kindness and respect, both towards oneself and others. Through this initiative, participants developed greater emotional awareness and learned to interact respectfully with others.

### ***Fostering Empathy***

These practices foster empathy by cultivating the ability to understand and share others' feelings. Participants were inspired to support one another, creating a culture of trust and compassion.

### ***Cultural Relevance***

This context serves as an introduction or footnote, emphasizing the ongoing importance and cultural relevance of empathy within the arts community.

**Feature**  
**"Hidden"**

**By: Katelyn Lu**

**Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award**

**Advisor/Sponsor: Yun Cheng**

**Shanghai American School Pudong**

**"Hidden"** is a piece I choreographed to encourage people to open their hearts. As a third-culture kid with roots in both China and America, I often experience both collectivist and individualist cultures. In collectivist cultures, social acceptance is prioritized over personal well-being. I often find myself striving to become that girl who has perfect grades and a likable personality, but at the cost of losing myself...

Sometimes, it feels like everyone is expected to be some "super-human", easily conquering any emotional or physical challenge. But that is impossible. Everyone has worries.

Everyone has issues. Everyone has emotions. Therefore, I conducted an anonymous survey with 26 participants from various age groups on societal expectations, discouragement, and stress. I then incorporated these responses

into my music through a Voiceover.

I also incorporated two props: a wooden box inspired by Pandora's Box as a safe for hidden stresses and two ribbons covered with survey keywords of people's stresses, their length representing our never-ending struggles. Using these props logically, purposefully, and creatively was one of my most significant choreographic challenges. In fact, the props and Voiceover weren't part of my original plan, as I usually dive straight into choreography when creating dances.

However, my teacher encouraged me to think deeper and consider possibilities beyond movement. Hence, another challenge was being able to subtract movement and focus on intention. With that, I truly hope "Hidden" can elicit reflection and, ironically, help people unhide their true selves.

*PC Katelyn Wu*



**Feature**

**"La Bruja ~ The Witch"**

**By: Miranda Aquino**

**Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award**

**Advisor/Sponsor: Estela Hernandez**

**USC Hybrid High School**

*I drew inspiration from Mexican folk dance to capture my culture flowing with my music choice and storyline.*

*Playing with levels, staccato, and especially arm movements allowed me to spotlight strength and emotion ~ as if I were flying.*

"La Bruja (The Witch)" reflects my relationship with femininity and machismo. At a young age, I was taught to be diligent in my achievements and strong in character. My emotions were bottled up most of the time, and when I was upset, I could not manage them. I was seen as dramatic and "too feminine", which I believed was not a reasonable answer, let alone something to say to someone young.

I grew up learning how to disassociate myself from the common stereotype influenced by machismo. "Strong and aggressive masculine pride" is something that has been branded in various cultures, including my own. I learned that I did not have to live by others' standards and could be the feminine persona I always wanted to be. Not the dramatic type others labeled me, but the resilient, tough, and determined feminine I would grow into.

Being a witch in this scenario means that we have no direct path to follow, so all we can do is *fly*. People would continue to judge, but it shouldn't be the purpose that weighs us down. 'Flying' to me is the ability to move freely, which inspired me to fully improvise my audition. I wanted it to be as authentic as possible, proving my unique path.



PC Miranda Aquino

*Feature*  
***The Shadow that Peter Pan Inspired ~  
A Gift to My Sister  
By: Salia Hartmann  
Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award  
Advisor/Sponsor: Rachel Miranda  
Ridge High School***

**The** title of my solo is “*The Shadow*.” My choreography was inspired by Peter Pan and the complex relationship with his shadow, which symbolizes his youthful, mischievous side. While they may conflict at times, Peter Pan is always working to reattach his shadow ~ and reclaim that innocent part of himself.

I began developing my choreography with the intent of highlighting how the pair represents the challenges people face while losing their youth. At the beginning of the process, I found it challenging to find a movement that depicted a relationship as a soloist. I decided to incorporate dynamic, reaching movements to represent the separation of myself from my shadow.

I also initially struggled to connect with the audience. I adjusted my movement to face the audience and focus on facial expressions,



allowing each viewer to find their own meaning in my dance. As the choreography continued to evolve, I found a personal connection within my intent.

I envisioned Peter Pan and the shadow’s relationship to mirror the one I have with my older sister. We have danced together since we were toddlers. I began as a timid dancer hiding in her shadow, but choreographing a solo for the first time helped me gain independence and confidence.

Finalizing this original piece was a turning point for me as a dancer.

It allowed me to put aside my fears and truly step into my abilities as a choreographer.

*PC Salia Hartmann*



## **Feature**

### ***The Art of Expression: Gestures and Movement in Choreography***

**By: Sarah Skney**

**Advisor/Sponsor:**

**Rachel Swenson**

**Idaho Fine Arts Academy**

**Choreography is the art of creating sequences of movement or actions that represent meanings, emotions, or stories, and which numerous cultures have explored throughout time. Emotive gestures enhance choreography design, particularly when expressive movements are involved. A gesture is often a relatively small movement of a part of the body, and in contrast, movements are larger and built by design within a composition. When blended harmoniously, these components make choreography a dynamic means of communication.**

**Gestures are purposeful and symbolic, often serving as a form of natural human behavior, like pointing, waving, or nodding. In dance, they may function as a narrative device where choreographers express visually rather than verbally. For instance, in contemporary dance, even such simple steps as heart touching can represent love, desire, or pain, depending on the situation and the dancer's message. In ballet, gestures can take the form of arm movements in a giving position to mean abundance or submission. In hip hop or street styles, their use includes hand signs or specific arm movements, which add to their style and flow.**

**Choreographers create their own signature moves by manipulating components in the following ways:**

- Amplification, which involves scaling a given gesture so that it is more exaggerated than before.**
- Change in repetition, where a gesture is performed multiple times to reinforce thinking or feeling within a specific area.**
- Distortion, which involves altering the quality, speed, or shape of an action to create a different message.**

**In the book “*Choreography: A Basic Approach Using Improvisation*,” the author states: “Choreographers often play with variation in timing. You’ll find that manipulation of tempo (speed) of your movements is easier traveling with an underlying sound, known as the beat or pulse” (Minton 37). This type of timing and speed can influence the feeling of an entire dance, making the audience react based on the execution of a dance. With these methods, simple gestures become complex phrases full of meaning.**



framework of the choreography. Actions are split up by their energy, form, and spatial traces. Using dynamic principles, weight, flow, and time, choreographers control movements to elicit certain feelings or emotions. Movement in each direction, level, or shape, determines how an audience perceives it.

Movements that extend outward are suggestive of openness or freedom, while contracted inward motions depict introspection or tension. Formations of movement also contribute to choreography. Circular pattern movements made by a dancer may depict continuity or unity, whereas angular, sharp movements can depict rigidity or conflict. The emotional impression that a dance evokes is affected by fluid, percussive, sustained, or erratic movement qualities. For example, a flowing movement suggest grace or ease, while sharp staccato actions may depict aggression or urgency.

Having contrasting movement qualities within a dance piece creates variety and makes the dance appealing to the viewers. Speed and timing also contribute to the overall feeling of a piece. Slow, sustained movements often evoke a sense of contemplation, while fast, syncopated movements create excitement and intensity. Playing with pauses and stillness within movement sequences can add dramatic tension and highlight key moments in the choreography.

There are numerous approaches for choreographers to combine basic movements, and a dance piece comes together perfectly when every gesture is connected. Possibilities include movement development, motifs, improvisation, layering gestures with full-body movement, musicality, and phrasing. A motif is an idea defined as a repeated pattern used to symbolize a central theme.

When a motif is set in the early creative stages and later developed, the choreographer ensures that the piece is cohesive in all

aspects. Most choreographers like to play with improvisation for the creation of useful gestures and movements. Images, emotions, or even verbal prompts, when given to dancers, can elicit random movements that can later be shaped into a coherent sequence and developed into dance choreography.

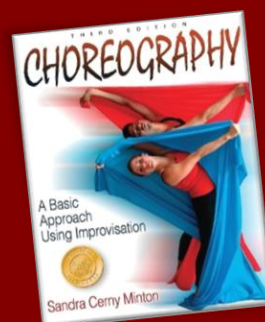
Choreographers also use the Reverse of Isolation: instead of examining single movements, they place them within full-body movements. For example, a dancer extends a hand forward while leaning onto the torso and legs. Choreographers also place the composition's accent within the music's beats or phrases for expressing deeper meaning and emphasis. The emotional value of music will be enhanced by the gesture that has been prepared, which is aimed at adapting the music.

Communication of gestures and movements is important in the development of choreography as it contributes to how the finished work looks and how it will be received. Though gestures capture specific kinds of speech and story, movements capture the rest of the piece and provide a structure with a certain fluidity and dynamism. Choreographers make their works engaging on an intellectual or emotional level by varying the use of spaces, quality of movements, tempo, and motif development. In contemporary dance, ballet, and street styles, the combined use of gestures and movements takes choreography effectively beyond activities of the human body to an art form.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Work Cited

Minton, Sandra Cerny. *Choreography: A Basic Approach Using Improvisation*. Human Kinetics, 2007.





Mike Reid

*All PC Idaho Fine Arts Academy*



*All PC Frisco Liberty High School NHSDA Chapter Members*

**Feature**

***Liberty High School Celebrates the Hispanic Culture***

***¡Larga vida a la cultura hispana!***

***By: Liberty High School NHSDA members***

***Advisor/Sponsor: Nicole Nothe***

***Liberty High School***

**We** have a wonderful experience celebrating all the Hispanic and Latin cultures in our Liberty High School dance classes, especially during Hispanic Heritage Month. Among the highlights, the amazing Claudia Vera has taught us Ballet Folklorico dances. During her workshop, students learn traditional dances and their cultural significance, which have gained relevance beyond their borders. These dances are full of challenging skirt movements and are so much fun to learn!

For two regions, Jalisco and Chiapas, Ms. Vera emphasizes the richness of the skirts in these dances, sharing how each movement and costume element carries meaning. And another dance, "El Gallito," translated as "The Dance of the Rooster," hails from the Mexican region of Nayarit and is renowned

for its challenging skirt movements, making it an enjoyable and lively dance to learn.

The dance carries an allegorical meaning, with a rooster and a hen symbolizing the courtship between a man and a woman. Both performers wear extremely colorful costumes and tap in unison, expressing the playful and intricate nature of their relationship. The man wears pants, a white embroidered shirt, and an attractive hat. The woman's costume features a satin skirt and blouse, with a wide, bright design and floral hair adornments.

One of the most striking features of "El Gallito" is the movement imparted to the skirt by the rhythm, highlighting both the artistry and cultural heritage of the dance. Here is a sampling of the nationalities we have celebrated so far:

Mexico  
Cuba  
Venezuela  
Brazil

Argentina  
Chile  
Spain  
Peru

Puerto Rico  
Venezuela  
Honduras



And on Instagram, a tribute to dancers throughout modern history who have paved the way for others of Hispanic descent to become a part of this art form and are truly an inspiration to us.



## Feature

### *Arangetram.: Celebrating My Indian & Croatia Culture*

By: *Sonia Ivancic*

*Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award*

*Advisor/Sponsor: Suhanaya Mahadevan*

*Shishya School of Performing Arts*

*On the day of my Arangetram, lights flicker over the patchwork of my family in the audience: Croatian cousins, Indian grandparents, and a Czech uncle. The differences stack high ~ race, customs, dance styles. Yet, as I take the stage, I am empowered by the common threads that bind us.*

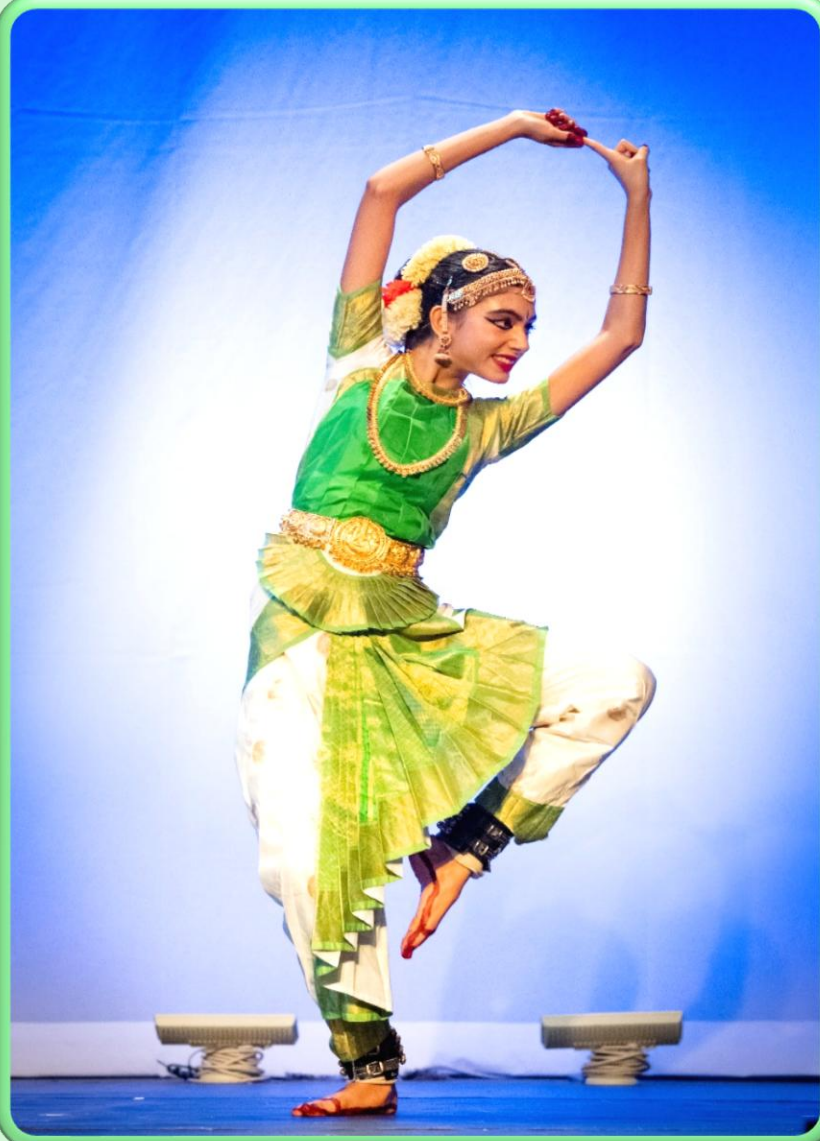
**A**s an Indian classical dancer, I decided to complete my *Arangetram* ~ a graduation debut performance consisting of 10 dances I had learned over years of rigorous training. Applying Bharatanatyam to articulate multi-cultural themes while staying true to the dance form's ancient roots, I have learned the valuable life skill of holding contradictions and finding nuances in this intersection. I had always wanted to include a dance about my Croatian and Indian heritage in my *Arangetram*.

A few months before the performance, I began choreographing this item but found it difficult to blend free-form Croatian melodies with Indian rhythms. I could not bridge my two sides. Looking for inspiration, I reread journal entries from my visit to the villages of my Croatian ancestors, who escaped persecution by relying on perseverance and community. I instinctively related this to my Indian grandfather, who juggled three jobs while studying to uplift his family.

These common themes of resilience and connection motivated me to return to the songs and listen for parallel stories, values, and struggles. I found these similarities everywhere ~ in the music and in my own family. I combined songs about two rivers: the Indian Narmada and the Croatian Cetina.

My continuous, sweeping steps conveyed a river's ability to flow through obstacles and find its way home, reminiscent of both my family's histories. Choreographing this piece taught me that common ground and diversity can coexist and reinforce one another beautifully.

*PC Sonia Ivancic*





*Feature*

*The Equinox of Mind*

*By Marilyn Chen*

*Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award*

*Advisor/Sponsor: Ann Robideaux*

*Princeton Day School*

*To be an artist is to be a servant of humanity; to be a Chinese American dancer is to have the unique responsibility of being a cultural ambassador through art.*

*Every time I dance, I approach this mission mindfully.*

*As an Asian American individual and a dancer trained in both*

*Classical Chinese and Western dance styles,*

*one of the greatest struggles I've experienced is the*

*dissonance, imperfection, and balance.*

*At times, I have been labeled as "too Chinese," at others "too American."*

*Sometimes too little, sometimes too much.*

*In my experience, when a child grows up experiencing conflicting*

*expectations and projections of identity,*

*it is not the cultures, but instead parts of the Self, that are slowly erased.*

*I experimented with this sense of balance in my original choreography titled*

*"The Equinox of Mind."*

*It is symbolically a modern dance solo in Graham Technique,*

*infused with elements of Classical Chinese dance and Classical Chinese aesthetics,*

*such as moderation, harmonic movement, and breath.*

*It isn't quite accurate to say that I dance because I am a choreographer, or that I choreograph because I am a dancer. More precisely, my determination to choreograph stems from my identity. I am myself, and I am most grateful for*

*who I have become through dance—as an American, as a student, and as a person.*

*"The Equinox of Mind" is about what it felt like growing up as*

*a little Chinese American girl:*

*at the same time, 'Western' but also 'Eastern,' Classical but also Modern, all at once.*

*I intend this dance to be a deliberate act of protest against the reductive*

*categorizations of identity ~ A declaration of who I am.*

*I am myself; a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.*



*PC Marilyn Chen*



PC Eric Liang

### *The Professor & La Fille Danse*

*By: Eric Liang*

*Finalist, NHSDA Award*

*Advisor/Sponsor: Rebecca Weger*

*The Dancer's EDGE*

*“La fille danse quand elle joue avec moi  
Et je pense que je l'aime des fois.”*

**T**he title of my contemporary solo is “*The Professor & La Fille Danse*.” The music selection was challenging to match the style I wanted to achieve, and ultimately, I landed on Damien Rice’s song of the same name, with its rich storytelling and surprising lyrics at the end. There is a long pause before switching to French in the final few verses.

My technical goal was to switch up the choreography style I had been dancing for the last few years, which featured bombastic movements and tricks throughout. I was unhappy with how my solos ran because it felt like I was yelling loudly through dance instead of making artistic choices.

This time, I aimed to reel in the process by working with more thoughtful subtleties and saving the big moments for later. Making this switch wasn’t easy, as my instinct was to revert to my previous approach. However, I drew great inspiration from dancers who excelled in smooth movement. They were mainly my older peers at my dance studio. They were, to me, an example of good movement quality, and when creating my solo, I wished to express artistic ideas similar to theirs while maintaining my own strengths.

Rice’s “*The Professor & La Fille Danse*” offered a wealth of material for a choreographer to work with, and it was highly unique.

*The song touches on heartbreak and the confusion that often follows,  
which, unfortunately, is most relatable for me.*



All PC Camila Almonte

## **Feature**

### **“Dancing to Discover”**

**By: Camila Almonte**

**Advisor/Sponsor: Ms. Darcy Marocki**

**SONG AND DANCE JNE**

**Studio of the Arts**

*Dance allows me to be introspective and challenge myself  
not only as a dancer;  
but as a productive person.*

**J**'ve been dancing for about 11 years in total (competitively for only 2 years). Throughout these years, I've strived to answer a difficult question that other dancers may be asking...

*“Why do I continue?”*

The truth is, at times, it can be tricky to find the answer to this question. When you look at all that has happened this previous season, you might only be seeing stressful quick changes, low adjudications, or those times you messed up on stage.

However, with my experience in dance, I have found that the answer to this question is more long-term than anything else. Dancing allows you to visualize your goals for who you want to be, not only as a dancer but as a human.

If you are a dancer like me, you are a huge perfectionist. If you don't manage to stick a trick on the first try or fall out of a turn, you feel like you have failed. Although it is easier than it sounds, it's important to remember that you dance solely for yourself. You can train hard to be the best dancer in the class, but where does that get you? You may impress your teacher, but are you truly impressing yourself? What your instructors want to see is personal, consistent growth. Your biggest competition is yourself. However, dancing reveals a deeper truth about yourself.

By attending classes every week, you learn how to portray different characters. For example, in your lyrical class, you may be learning a dance that requires you to act as a shy person who struggles to find their inner confidence. However, when you finish that class and head into your jazz class, you may be practicing choreography where you must act as though you have all the confidence in the world. This experience reveals a great deal about yourself.

When I perform on stage, I like to think of it as acting like a different version of myself. I am a shy person, but when I dance hip hop on stage, I look like I would be extremely extroverted. Dancing teaches you about who you can be by encouraging you to act as another version of yourself.

You can be anyone you want to be through dance, despite being different from your peers. Whether or not you come from a certain culture or have a certain disability doesn't define who you are as a dancer. Your unique story doesn't limit the respect you'll receive from your community. In fact, it can push you to further explore your current self and influence other dancers to do so as well.

Dancing to discover doesn't only mean to discover who you can be, but also who you already are. When you use dance to discover who you already are and who you have always been, you'll embrace your own story ~ your personal values, beliefs, and identity. As a

result, you are bound to invite a long-lasting wave of self-confidence into your life.

When you find the importance in dancing for yourself, you can discover who you are and what your personal goals are. Realistically, suppose you graduate and pursue a path that does not involve dancing. In that case, it won't matter very much how many pirouettes you were able to do or how high your arabesque extended. What will matter is how you have grown as a person. To answer the question,

*"Why do I continue?"*

I continue to dance because I find myself and experience different versions of who I can be. As I enter the upcoming dance season, I will work hard to discover myself through dance, and I hope fellow dancers will do so as well.



## Feature

### *"Relinquishing" Heart & Image*

By: *Gianna Di Loreto*

*Honorable Mention, NHSDA Award*

*Advisor/Sponsor: Mary Gorder*

*All That Dance Seattle*

#### ***"The Girl Who Broke My Heart,"***

An instrumental piece by the Irish/American band The Gloaming has been a song I've frequently listened to with the intention of letting go, and it's taught me a lesson about perfection as I've grown as a dancer. Often, within our cultural restraints, we as artists seek movement that an audience is likely to enjoy, forgetting that its root, dance, is designed for us. I consistently catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, wondering, *"Do I look good when I do this?"*

The subtle music, as if resonating within the pure soul, blends well with my solo, titled *"Relinquishing,"* which represents my ongoing goal to dance with and for myself, to set aside the idea of perfection, thereby preventing it from controlling me, allowing my truest self a chance to dance.

My goal is to pull my gaze away from the mirror, the imaginary audience, and the perspective someone may have when they watch me dance and instead pay attention to how each movement feels and the artistry it conveys. I know proper technique, and I am at liberty to evaluate myself with that knowledge, rather than second-guessing myself in the mirror.

In the process, I worked to feel, rather than look, as I danced. I was surprised to discover trends in my choreography, such as outstretched arms, changing focus, and traveling through space.



*PC Gianna Di Loreto*



*All PC Hokule'a Academy*

### **Feature**

## ***The Star Behind the Magic~ Hokule'a Academy in Chicago***

***By: Hokule'a Academy***

***NHSDA Advisor/Sponsor David A. Acevedo & Members***

*Hōkūle'a, "The Star of Gladness," shines brightly in the night sky over the Hawaiian Islands. This celestial body guided early Polynesian navigators from the Society Islands to Hawai'i, the first humans to inhabit the volcanic landscape. Just as Hōkūle'a led them to happiness, our dance classes and performances aim to bring people closer to happiness.*

**F**ostering a culture rooted in Care, Confidence, Community, and Growth within our Hokule'a Academy studio, we serve a greater artistic purpose for our students, professional dancers in Chicago, and the broader community. We authentically represent the diverse cultures of Polynesia through precise music, choreography, and attire. Embracing many unique styles, from Māori Kapa Haka to Siva Samoa and 'Ori Rapa Nui, our dancers mainly train in Hawaiian Hula and 'Ori Tahiti.

We're especially excited about our Teams. Whether someone is interested in performing or improving their skills, this is a rewarding place for all ages and abilities.

The Performance Team ambassadors share their enthusiasm with audiences through sparkling showcases, building leadership and artistic growth while mentoring novices.



The Costume Team, composed of parents, students, and volunteers craft exquisite, authentic, handmade costumes. Their dedication and creativity ensure dancers are proud, polished, and in harmony with Polynesian tradition. As they develop their sewing, weaving, and crafting skills, the team gains knowledge of traditional materials. The Experience Team enhances joy, beauty, and hospitality by organizing special events, crafting memorable moments for dancers and audiences alike.

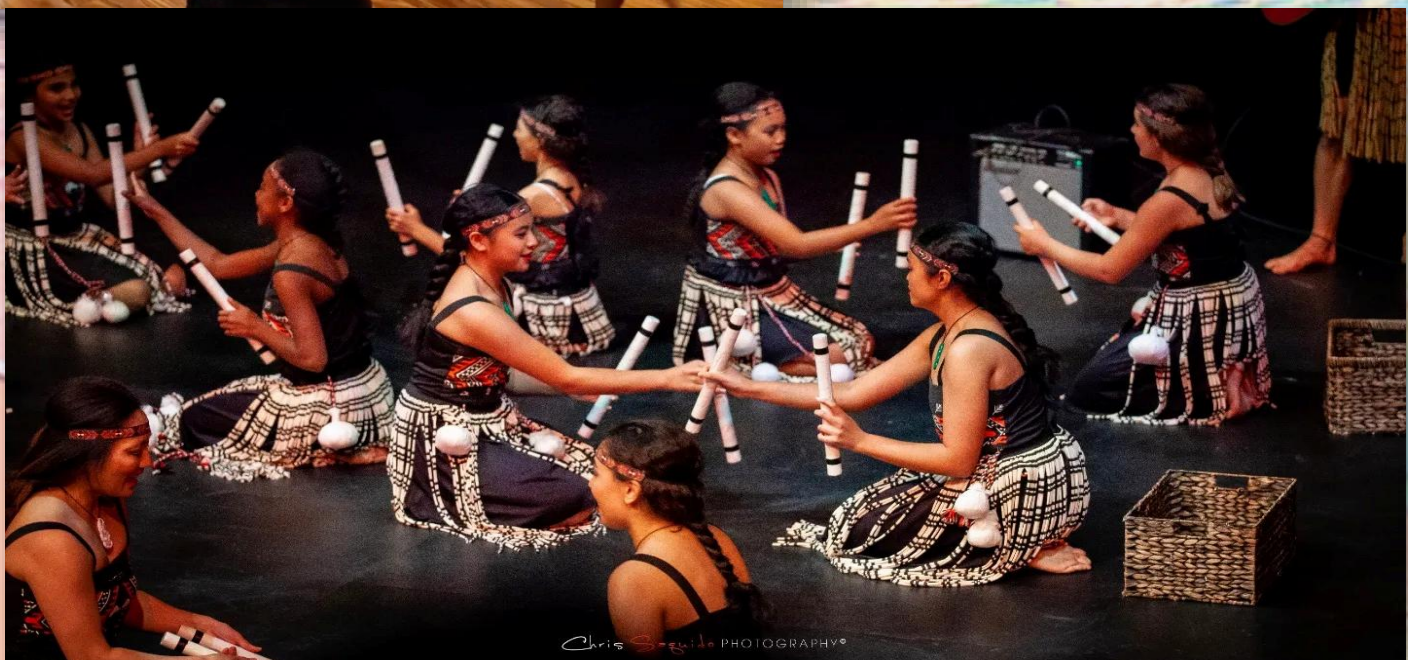
And among these precious pearls, Hōkūle‘a Academy welcomes passionate professional artists to perform at venues across Chicago and beyond ~ showcasing the amazing Polynesian culture.

Students and audiences alike applaud the Hōkūle‘a Academy curriculum and performances:

*"Listening to Polynesian music calms me. Plus, dance is a fun way to exercise."*

*"This style of dance brings people together to share this powerful culture as a family."*

*"I love the energy of O'Tahiti."*





*Wishing All,  
Peace & Joy  
Dancing into  
New Year!*



*PC Eliana Arriaga*



***Dance Arts Now!***  
***Editorial Staff***

***Ray Schwartz,***  
***NDEO Executive Director***

***Melissa Greenblatt,***  
***NDEO Managing Director***



***Colleen Hearn Dean,***  
***Senior Editor***

***Shelby Bensinger,***  
***NHSDA Program Coordinator***

***Dance Arts Now!*** is a publication of the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO)  
8609 2nd Avenue, Suite 203-B Silver Spring, MD 20910 301.585.2880

©National Dance Education Organization, 2025, All Rights Reserved

***Disclaimer:***

***The National Honor Society for Dance Arts (NHSDA) recognizes the outstanding achievements of dance students in both the public and private sectors. To foster this true art form, we respect and encourage freedom of expression and speech for philosophical, cultural, and religious beliefs. All opinions and beliefs articulated in this newsletter are those of the article authors. Reference herein to any specific religious beliefs or practices does not necessarily constitute or imply its endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by NHSDA or the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO). The views and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily state or reflect those of the National Honor Society for Dance Arts or NDEO.***

***Contributing writers or their institutions submitted all photos unless otherwise noted.***



***ATTN: NHSDA Members,***  
***Be Published!***

***Dance Arts Now!*** is the official newsletter of the National Society for Dance Arts™ (NHSDA) Junior and Secondary programs. Our Editorial Staff invites student members and their chapter sponsors to contribute stories, poems, articles, chapter news, photos, and other creative works for our future editions.

PC NDEO

