

Professional Ballet Program Report from the Artistic Director 2008/2009

The 2008/09 school year marked my 20th anniversary as Artistic Director of Canada's National Ballet School. The primary focus within this year, and the proceeding two decades, was the ongoing evolution of NBS's Professional Ballet Program, the School's epicentre. While the breadth of NBS' programming is a valued reality, these activities strengthen the School's core program. The overriding quest is not simply to train gifted students to become beautiful professional dancers but to educate them in a healthy, balanced environment to fulfill their potential as creative human beings.

While much about this training process follows the art form's long honoured traditions, the impact of the world's ever quickening change of pace has necessitated profound changes to our approach. While children are no less wonderful today, immersion in virtual technology means that children and adults are less physically fit than ever before; many hopeful NBS applicants arrive at auditions never having climbed a tree or ridden a bicycle and some lack the flexibility to comfortably bend over to tie their shoes. Those who are accepted now require extensive physical conditioning to prepare them for the rigours of ballet training.

As well, in North America, there is now an awareness in all educational settings that we are struggling with a disproportionate sense of entitlement. In an effort to build children's self esteem, there is a tendency during periods of struggle to look for an external villain rather than exploring the benefits of persisting through process. To add fuel to the fire, we live in a culture addicted to reality TV talent contests which promote over-night success.

This seems an appropriate forum for sharing an overview of the evolution of NBS' educational approach to respond to these pressures.

To support the highest level of physical fitness, we initiated an exercise program designed by highly respected neuromuscular specialist Irene Dowd, which addresses the specific needs of ballet dancers and includes cardio training in our swimming pool. This involved extending the length of ballet classes so this exercise regime becomes an integral part of daily training.

As I want there to be a distinctive difference between the ethos of a body conditioning session with its focus on body mechanics, we also established a Drama and Expression program masterfully created and overseen by that luminous artist Sorella Englund. As well, parallel to all ballet classes, we began scheduling "Dancer's Clinics" where an individual's challenges could be discussed one-on-one. This also frees the ballet teacher to focus in class

on the glorious relationship between form, movement and dramatic intent, rather than form alone. The mandate for the Physiotherapy department was repositioned to go beyond preventing injuries to assisting individual students to explore more fully their potential. We initiated more regular performance appraisals between individual students and their daily ballet teacher.

Performance presentations were adapted to incorporate the range of repertoire found within today's professional ballet companies—classical, 20th-century and contemporary—and also encouraged the students to choreograph themselves. The 2009 Spring Showcase repertoire included a remount of Erik Bruhn's *Swan Lake (Act 1, scene ii)* and new works created by renowned choreographers, Sabrina Matthews and Matjash Mrozewski, both NBS alumni.

Hosting regular and ongoing forums for parents to demystify the overall challenges of guiding a gifted child intent on becoming a world-class professional ballet dancer, has proven invaluable. We continue to expand our student exchange program with professional ballet schools around the world to assist not only our own students but a whole generation of young dancers to acquire the sense of the broader ballet community. To date we now have 23 established exchange arrangements in place in locations around the globe.

A comprehensive career planning process, linked with our exchange program, focuses as much on educating/supporting the parents as the students. The definition and measurement of success within the career planning process and the achievements of alumni are more clearly defined to help students and parents stay on track with long term goals.

These priorities informed Canada's National Ballet School's decision to mark its 50th Anniversary by hosting an International Dance Festival with its twelve original partner schools; the overriding goal is to galvanize and strengthen the international ballet community, most specifically through the student choreographic works, the combined daily ballet classes and considering from the students perspective how to cultivate creative, dynamic arts organizations. The scope of this event is only possible thanks to Aeroplan's extraordinary generosity.

This theme is linked to my increasing awareness over the past years that students need to be more actively engaged in the process of evolving programs. So, three years ago we created a cross-generational NBS committee named the "Nexus Council." Last year the students took the lead in revising the School's code

of core values and shared ideals and the results are inspiring. There is now a determination for staff and students alike to have a clearer sense of their roles and responsibilities, including a ballet-appropriate definition of rigour, discipline and self discipline.

These ideas clearly resonate for others as NBS' gifted artistic faculty are regularly invited to lead professional development forums around the world—most frequently in Scandinavia and Spain. On a personal note, I was very moved to receive an Honorary Doctorate in Humanities from Mount Saint Vincent University in October 2008.

Possibly most significant is the success of our graduates, 95% of whom find employment in dance companies across Canada and around the world. With NBS now celebrating its 50th Anniversary and alumni having been in the field for decades, many are in leadership roles as Artistic Directors of international companies and schools. As well, the diversity of the students' dance education is clearly working as two boys were recently selected from world-wide auditions to play the leading role in *Billy Elliot*, one on Broadway and the other in the Chicago production being launched in February 2010. With respect to recruitment into the Professional Ballet Program, an increasing number of boys are applying to NBS and our Junior School enrolment is now close to being 50% male. The standard of talent overall is excellent. With our Residence facilities officially completed in October 2008, these adolescents are now housed in the best possible conditions.

In terms of the role of ballet in today's world, I believe civilization needs dance artists more than ever before. They are the inspirers of human dreams. At NBS we have the privilege of guiding gifted young human beings to explore the original intent of theatre as framed a millennia ago by the Greeks—to make visible the divine.

Mavis Staines, DHumL
Artistic Director and Co-CEO

Career Planning Report 2008/2009

The demands placed on professional dancers today are much greater than ever before. As a result, dance training has had to become a much broader field, one that encompasses not only different styles of dance and movement, but one that helps emerging artists prepare themselves for the demands of a professional performance career.

Career Planning at Canada's National Ballet School has become a very valuable part of the training and education of our young artists. The process is begun in Grade 10, in a career studies class led by Academic Vice Principal Deb Meadley. Students begin by researching a dance company they think they may one day want to work with. This research continues into Grade 11, where students are given "Guidelines for Selection of a Company" which provides students with a list of useful questions. When answered, these will help indicate what type of professional environment the student would best be suited to. The process evolves further in Grade 12, when students work closely with their Career Planning counselor to decide what their personal strengths and challenges are, and where they think their next step is leading, be it towards a professional career, a university education, or further training through a Post Secondary Program at NBS, or a similar institution. Counselors stress that Post Secondary education is often closely linked to companies of interest. Career Planning continues into the Post Secondary Program, when students take all the information they've gathered and finalize a list of targeted companies. They research travel and audition requirements, revise photos and resumes, and finally book audition times.

The success of recent graduates is quite impressive, companies that employ graduates from the past three years include The National Ballet of Canada, Alberta Ballet, Royal Ballet of Flanders, Royal Danish Ballet, Dutch National Ballet, Dresden Semperoper Ballet, Northern Ballet Theatre, Leipzig Ballet, Dusseldorf Ballet, Ballet Kelowna, National Ballet of Mexico, Joffrey Ballet, Stuttgart Ballet, New York City Ballet, Boston Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Zurich Ballet, Ballet San Jose, Orlando Ballet and Introdans.

Schools where recent graduates are continuing their education include the English National Ballet School, the John Cranko School—affiliated with the Stuttgart Ballet—Central School of Ballet, the Palucca Schule Dresden, the Royal Dutch Conservatory, and the Rotterdam Dance Academy.

New for the Career Planning program this year is a move to further include the wider NBS community, specifically parents and families, into the career planning decisions. This is accomplished through posting Career Planning information on the parents' section of the NBS website. As well, the one-on-one parental meetings for all parents of Grade 12 NBS students is a recent initiative that has proven to be quite well received by all parties. Also new this year is a workshop with the Dancer Transition Centre for the PSP students; while usually thought of as a resource to help dancers transitioning out of their dance careers, this unique organization also helps emerging artists transition into their professional careers.

While the demands of the professional dance world continue to expand, it is our hope that through the proper guidance and assistance, each student can find the appropriate place for their next steps. This will hopefully evolve into the future as we continue to fortify our network of affiliations throughout the dance community. This year's Assemblée Internationale will provide a unique and valuable opportunity for staff and students to do just that!

Shaun Amyot
Career Planning

NBS Graduates 2005 to 2008

Where are they now?

2005 Graduates

Christina Cecchini Ballet Kelowna
Hannah Egan Lee Independent work
Alexandre Grant Independent work
Sigmund Hegstad Ballett Mannheim
Jesse Inglis National Ballet of Mexico
Dan Mee Kin Independent work
Ji Won Kim University of Toronto student
Catherine Maitland The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Stephanie Marchese Independent work
Antonella Martinelli The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Caitlin Meighan Joffrey Ballet – corps de ballet
Brent Parolin Stuttgart Ballet – corps de ballet
David Prottas New York City Ballet
Chao Shi Dutch National Ballet – corps de ballet

2006 Graduates

Rodrigo Almarales Gonzalez Ballet Ullate
Mark Dennis Alberta Ballet – corps de ballet
Nadine Drouin The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Naoya Ebe The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Isabella Gasparini Northern Ballet Theatre – corps de ballet
Selene Guerrero Trujillo The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Caitlin Hoffman Independent work
Nikki Holck NBS Post-Secondary Program
Yoo Sang Hong Ballet Jorgen
Erica Horwood Dutch National Ballet – corps de ballet
Lauren Kempton Culinary Arts School
Philippa Leslie University of Toronto student
Tabitha Perry University of Toronto student
Hana Rutka Central School of Ballet
Yoshiya Sakurai Boston Ballet 2
Kiley Schroeder Independent studies
Kevin Thomas Colorado Ballet
Sarah Wolff The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet

2007 Graduates

Reiko Aramaki Independent work
Emily Aubert York University student
Julian Botnarenko NBS Post-Secondary Program
Rayna Bradshaw George Brown College student
Maxence Bush Introdans
Matthew Chiu Independent work
Riah Fielding-Walters Independent work
Eloi Homier Ballet Kelowna
Ji Min Hong NBS Post-Secondary Program
Sarah Kingston Leipzig Ballet – corps de ballet
Yukino Kitamura working in Japan
Heather MacIsaac Apprentice, Stuttgart Ballet
Benedikt MacIsaac Independent work in the Netherlands
Elizabeth Marrable The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Claire Maurey Leipzig Ballet Theater Klasse
Rhiannon McCluskey University of Toronto student
Kealan McLaughlin Apprentice, Alberta Ballet
Josephine Minhinnett Queens University student
Shino Mori The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Ian Parsons Ballet de Monte Carlo
Alexandra Pike Royal Ballet of Flanders – corps de ballet
Julia Sedwick Apprentice, The National Ballet of Canada
Bryant Steenstra Royal Danish Ballet – corps de ballet
Alyson Yamada Stanford University student

2008 Graduates

Simon Ahmadi NBS Post-Secondary Program
Danielle Bezaire Royal Conservatory Den Haag
Armando Biasi Independent work
Alexander Bozinoff John Cranko Schule
Brittany Bristow pursuing acting career
Jessica Burrows Apprentice, The National Ballet of Canada
Eric Christison English National Ballet School
Sara Garbowski Apprentice, Cannes Jeune Ballet
Alexis Geddes Apprentice, Introdans
Martha Hart Apprentice, Dresden SemperOper Ballet
Julie Hobby Sheridan College student
Alexandra Inculet NBS Post-Secondary Program
Shimon Ito Ballet San Jose
Kailey Kaba Leipzig Ballet Theater Klasse
Teegan Kollmann Royal Conservatory, Den Haag
Kohhei Kuwana Orlando Ballet
Mara Livezey University in Kalamazoo
Tobias MacIsaac Ballet Magdeburg
Samantha Newman Rotterdam Dance Academy
Adam Reist Zurich Ballet – corps de ballet
Brendan Saye The National Ballet of Canada – corps de ballet
Olga Tchekhonadskaia Manchester University Student

2009 Graduates

Laura Billet NBS Post-Secondary Program
Aja Brandmeier NBS Post-Secondary Program
Ellen Bull Pacific Northwest Ballet School
Esabelle Chen NBS Post-Secondary Program
Rebecca Connor NBS Post-Secondary Program
Heather Dunn English National Ballet School
Zaloe Fabbrinni Temporary contract Maggio Danza/Independent work
Kathryn Hosier Apprentice, The National Ballet of Canada
Larissa Kogut NBS Post-Secondary Program
Adrienna Matzeg NBS Post-Secondary Program
Nicole Meredith NBS Post-Secondary Program
Michelle Murphy NBS Post-Secondary Program
Diana Peters NBS Post-Secondary Program
Sasha Samion Independent studies/ NBS Post-Secondary Program
Julia Shao Sara Lawrence College student
Abigail Sheppard NBS Post-Secondary Program
Angelika Villalon Palucca Schule Dresden
Raphael Amiot-Savard NBS Post-Secondary Program
Rob Binet NBS Post-Secondary Program
Paul Calderone NBS Post-Secondary Program
Jackson Carroll Apprentice, The National Ballet of Canada
Jackson Dwyer John Cranko Schule (Stuttgart, Germany)
Graeme Fuhrman NBS Post-Secondary Program
Shawn Throop NBS Post-Secondary Program

Report from the Academic Principal 2008/2009

For students in the Professional Ballet Program, Grade 12 is the final year of the academic program. Most students are expected to graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), earning a minimum of 30 credits, including 18 compulsory credits and 12 optional credits. A credit recognizes the successful completion of a course for which a minimum of 110 hours has been scheduled. Students must also complete 40 hours of community service and pass the provincial Secondary School Literacy Test. The courses at NBS are university or university/college preparation courses with an emphasis on theory, concrete and abstract application, independent learning, and research skills. English, Music, History of Ballet and Communications Technology are compulsory courses in Grade 12. Optional subjects include Writer's Craft, French, Visual arts, Photography, Canadian and World Issues, Advanced Functions, Calculus and Vectors, Biology, Physics, and Chemistry. Grade 12 students are required to take a minimum of six academic courses in addition to the 4 dance credits obtained through ballet, comprehensive dance, modern dance, and dance performance.

In 2009 all of the Grade 12 graduates had at least an 80% average and so received the OSSD with honour standing. The average mark for the graduating class, based on academic subjects alone, was 84%. With the dance marks included, the average was 91%. The Governor General's Medal, awarded for academic excellence to the student who achieves the highest average, was presented by Judith Gelber, Chair of the Board of Directors, to Sasha Samion who had an average of 95%. The standards achieved in Grade 12 are reflective of the consistent standards to found throughout the academic program.

John F. Kennedy stated that leadership and learning are indispensable to each other. As part of a well rounded education, teachers encourage students to develop leadership and creativity through a variety of activities within the classroom and also through events such as Music Night, the Fashion Show, Jour Blanc, the collection for the Daily Bread Food Bank, and the production of the school yearbook. The Student Council met this year's target in raising funds to build a well in a village in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. The students are presently raising funds for SickKids Hospital, a world leader in children's health research and care. The students are also involved in a project to help alleviate poverty through Kiva which involves the microfinancing of loans to aid small entrepreneurial projects in third world countries.

Staff changes saw Jody Mount leaving to spend more time with her family, Peter Clifford moving to Peterborough, and Jessica Dreisziger and Lisa Fleischmann on maternity leave. We also welcomed some new staff to the academic program: Tim Campbell (photography), Joyce Zhu and Katherine Woodward (math and science), and Rachel Taylor and Cheryl Belkin-Epstein (History of Art and Ballet).

John Maitland
Academic Principal

Residence Report 2008/2009

I am happy to report that we are now utilizing all the space the residence has to offer. This past summer we were able to house all the auditioning and returning students without any over flow into the Ryerson Residence. The 18 exchange students lived in "D" Building while the rest of the students from grade 5 to 12 lived in 115 Maitland—all 166 of them.

This fall we have a total of 97 students living in residence. We are still able to keep the grade 11 and 12 students in their own wing which allows them to have a bit more privacy, independence and significantly larger bedrooms while the rest of the students enjoy their space in the new wing. Everyone is thrilled to be eating evening snack, breakfast and dinner in Currie Hall. What a treat to be able to enjoy your evening meal without having to share your chair with your knapsack, coat and boots.

Our goal this year—as it is every year—is to keep illness to a minimum, so we have designated three bedrooms that are exclusively used by students who are ill. We are sending students home if they live within a couple of hours' drive to recuperate, and are consulting with our pediatrician on a regular basis.

We have welcomed 3 George Brown College Child and Youth Worker students to the residence who are here from September to April doing their field work practicum. In January, a Social Service Worker student will have completed her training with us by the end of July. This is a win-win situation whereby the College students receive excellent training opportunities and we have extra staff on the floor. This allows for more individual attention for our students.

Over the last year the students have enjoyed being able to invite Day Students over in the evening and weekends to work on homework and socialize in the common areas of the residence. They have enjoyed playing the many table games which were so generously donated for our newly furnished recreation room. We have noted this year there are also more students living in residence being invited to Day students' homes for overnights on weekends; it's so good for our students to have a change of scenery.

The residence is buzzing with a great group of students and staff this year. We have created a safe atmosphere of respect for each students' uniqueness; we ensure that all students are well taken care of and that there is always time allotted for interesting conversations and fun.

Susan-Leslie Berkis

Head of Residence

Report on Teacher Training Program 2008/2009

The 2008/2009 graduating class of the Teacher Training Program included students from all over Canada including Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Quebec as well as a student from Italy. Incoming students came from the Philippines and Japan as well as from across Canada. The course for Professional Dancers was attended by dancers from Romania, Canada, Japan and Azerbaijan. With such a rigorous program, friendships were formed quickly as everyone had a common goal and a common interest in dance. All graduating students found employment quickly and some had their sights on working overseas. Of note are Giorgia Muratori who set up a school with a colleague in Italy, and Alana Della Mora who accepted a full time job in Singapore. Ashleigh Powell (winner of the Betty Oliphant award) is working in the Associates Program at NBS.

The year concluded with the annual Teachers' Seminar in August. The Seminar was well received with both returning and new teachers attending. This year the Cecchetti Society held their annual Summer workshop at NBS at the same time and the two groups of teachers were able to mingle through out the week. Long-time NBS neuromuscular consultant, Irene Dowd, partnered with biochemist and former dancer, Rebecca Dietzel. Participants also engaged in practical sessions including classes with Sorella Englund and artist in residence Peggy Baker.

With the growth of outreach activities at NBS, future plans include mentoring young teachers to train as workshop leaders to introduce dance to school age students—to get children healthier and learning through dance.

Anuschka Roes

Head, Teacher Training program

National Audition Tour Report 2008/2009

As NBS staff travel the country each year, it's always a remarkable adventure! First, we're charmed by the students we meet and inspired by their joy in dance. Then, as a bonus, tours afford time with colleagues, whether in departure lounges or over late suppers, that reminds us how fortunate we are to work together.

In each of the 20 cities we visit, students step into auditions with curiosity and resilience, demonstrating a tolerance for risk taking that we hope they'll opt for lifelong. The many young people who thank us for this experience show an impressive generosity of spirit, and we are grateful too to the parents who take the time to let us know our interactions with their children were constructive and affirming.

We're thankful to families who take a leap of faith by encouraging their child's wish to audition even when the logistics and finances involved may seem insurmountable. As Canada's National Ballet School, the mandate of our Professional Ballet Program is to recruit students with the talent and aptitude to train for a career in classical ballet. Thanks to our indefatigable administrative staff we are able to support each of the young dancers who deserves this opportunity.

Now we eagerly await Summer School 2010 and look forward to getting acquainted with the young dancers who arrive from across Canada and around the world to live their dream of professional ballet training.

Deborah Bowes

Head, Junior School and Auditions