

Dance and the Liberal Arts

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Presented at the **International Conference on the Liberal Arts**

September 30th – October 1st, 2010 at St. Thomas University, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Abstract:

Dance belongs in the Liberal Arts programs of universities. It is an artform that links mind and body, educating the whole person. In this experiential workshop we will explore selected dance activities that relate to dance history, basic dance technique (skills) and movement improvisation to demonstrate how dance can be an integral part of a liberal arts education program.

Biography:

Dr. Zsuzsanna Szabo-Nyarady is a lifelong dancer, movement educator, university lecturer, Pilates, yoga and dance teacher. Her background includes extensive training in dance, BFA in modern dance from York University (Toronto) and studies at various studios, including the School of Toronto Dance Theatre (Toronto), The Martha Graham Studio (New York), The Laban Institute of Movement Studies (New York), and others. Her university teaching experience includes instructing dance courses in Arts/Fine Arts, Kinesiology and Education faculties. She lectures in the Department of Culture and Language Studies at the University of New Brunswick and teaches dance, yoga and Pilates at St. Thomas University.

Purpose:

The purpose of the workshop is to promote dance literacy and dance education in Liberal Arts Programs.

Objectives:

The objectives of the workshop are to:

1. Discuss the history of dance as a discipline in university programs.
2. Provide the workshop participants with a dance experience that is accessible to all skill levels and illustrates the essence of dance as an art form.
3. Deepen the participants' understanding and appreciation of dance in a fun and relaxed atmosphere.
4. Create more interest in dance education at the university level.

Introduction and Discussion:

Dance is our first language. We communicate through movement before we learn our first spoken words. In dance our instrument is the human body and our material is movement. This ancient art form was / is present in every society all over the world.

Sometimes dance is referred to as the “mother of all arts”, an art form that is “older than man”.

As an academic subject in a university setting dance is relatively new. Gertrude Colby established the first dance program in 1913 at the Teacher's College of Columbia University (USA). The dance educator and scholar Margaret H'Doubler created the first dance major program at the University of Wisconsin (USA) in 1926. These and other early dance programs were included in physical education and teacher training programs.

By the 1950's and 1960's dance became recognized as a separate subject and was making it's way to be part of Liberal Arts and Fine Arts faculties.

The artistic innovations of dance artists of the 20th Century had a major influence on dance becoming established as an academic subject.

A summer dance university program that was created in the 1930's at Bennington College (Vermont, USA) and continues to this day as the American Dance Festival, now at Duke University (North Carolina, USA) brings together dance artists and educators to inspire the development of new ideas and programs.

During the 1960's and 1970's university dance programs in North America had a significant growth. The "dance boom" resulted in many new university dance courses and new programs to study.

Here in Canada the first dance department was established at York University in Toronto. The director was Grant Strate, the dancer, choreographer, educator and activist, considered by many as the "grand-papa" of university dance programs in Canada. After the York program was well established he moved to Vancouver and directed the new dance program at Simon Fraser University's School of Contemporary Arts. Now we have several other dance major programs including those at the University of Calgary, Concordia, Ryerson and Univesité du Québec.

The so-called "dance boom" lasted about 15 years (\approx 1965 – 1980). The relatively good economy, the availability of funding for dance and the large number of "baby-boomers" at university resulted in a significant growth of students majoring in dance, departments offering dance degrees and dance courses offered through physical education, education and liberal arts faculties.

Unfortunately the 1980's and 1990's experienced a "boom-to-bust" situation. Budget cuts destroyed many wonderful dance programs. The number of students decreased in all liberal arts programs, including in dance.

Now at the beginning of the 21st Century we do need more dance programs in higher education. Budget cuts have taken out many fundamental university level dance courses. The result is a great lack of basic dance literacy. Popular television shows like "So You Think You Can Dance" are good for promoting interest in dance. They are entertainment and let's hope that they will create the curiosity needed to focus on the real art form.

Studying dance at a professional school or conservatory is very much different from university dance education. Post-secondary dance courses do vary, but in addition to the studio work they provide a deeper knowledge of theory, history, philosophy, science and pedagogy.

Dance education in a liberal arts program inspires intellectual understanding and individual creativity. Keeping our sense of dance alive provides us with an art experience that needs to be maintained and passed to the next generation. As the philosopher Nietche said" "Let us consider every day lost on which we did no dance".

The Dance Workshop:

Appropriate for all skill levels

Theme: Connecting To Your "Inner Dancer"

Technique: modern/contemporary, basic ballet, yoga, dance improvisation

Props: Scarves and gymnastics ribbons

Music: Various artists

Comments:

Great group of dancers of all ages and skill levels

The energy level was high and everyone participated according to their abilities.

We all had a great time.

Thank you to all of my participants for being open-minded and willing to connect to your “inner dancers”. Please keep on dancing and promoting the positive effects of dance education in liberal arts programs.