



Royal  
Academy  
of Dance

Since 1920, the Royal Academy of Dance has had a significant influence on the dance teaching profession – not just in the United Kingdom but all over the world. And our work continues to make a real difference to the lives of our members, students, teachers and staff.

Classical ballet has played a central part in the RAD's history and to this day is fundamental to who we are. Our mission, however, has expanded over the years and now includes an ever-widening range of genres and activities. Our students, who now range from two and a half to those in their 90s, and from all walks of life, can study styles ranging from ballet to contemporary, to hip hop and jazz.

Our ever-increasing programme of outreach work brings dance into diverse communities, from those who are marginalised by circumstances or disability, to those who just want to have fun and get fit. And our Faculty of Education's research into how dance contributes to wellbeing has led to the development of specialist training for older learners.

The RAD is also the international centre for Benesh Movement Notation, which ensures that the work of choreographers is recorded and preserved.

The increasing diversity of our work means that our relationship with both our members and many different audiences is also very varied. How the RAD is perceived today is often determined by a very personal experience.

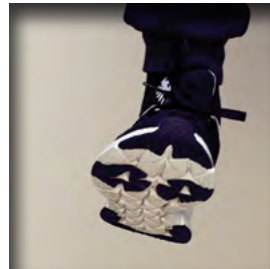
'my Dance' gives voice to those experiences from around the world, united by their RAD membership and their passion for dance. From our Artistic Director to Genée candidates' success stories and from members living in remote and far-flung places to figures playing important roles in their local communities, all have their voice here, adding to the unique story of the RAD.

As we approach our centenary year, I hope that all those who read this publication will enjoy what they read and will also get a vivid sense of the extraordinary organisation that is the RAD, and of the people who have shaped it and those who continue to do so.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luke Rittner'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Luke' written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name 'Rittner'.

Luke Rittner  
Chief Executive

We take pride in  
connecting with and  
inspiring a worldwide  
community of dance  
enthusiasts.



Share your  
**#myDance** story

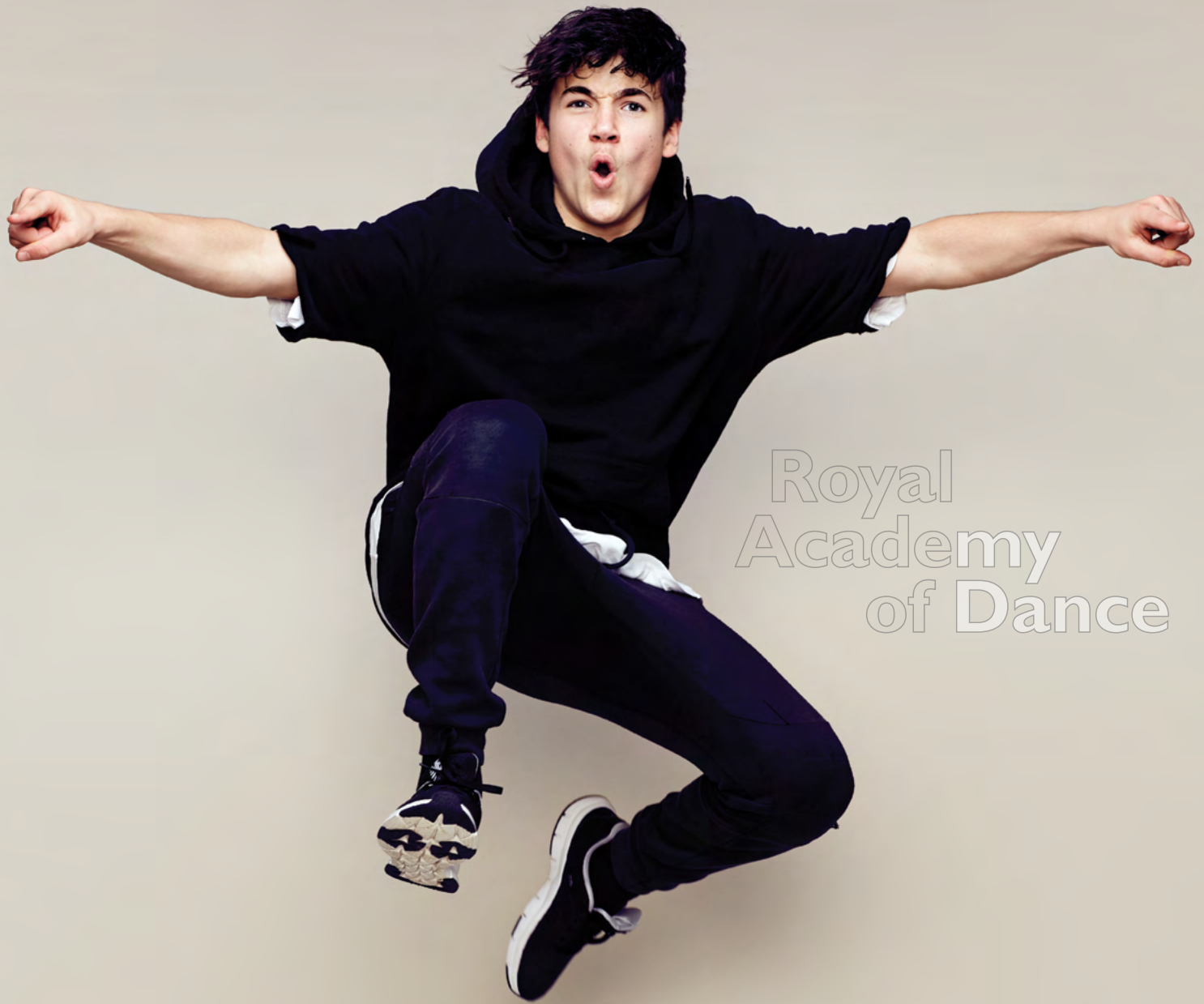
*“The sheer breadth of dancers on our shoot was a true revelation. It really did feel like all walks of life were represented – inclusiveness that I hadn’t expected. It made for a really unique and joyful day.”*

Spiros Politis, ‘my Dance’ photographer

Share your **#myDance** story

# Contents

- 04 **Keeping it fresh**  
*Jessica Wilson, RAD staff*
- 06 **Darcey Bussell CBE**  
*RAD President*
- 08 **Magic moments**  
*Lyn Vella-Gatt, RAD Full Member (notator)*
- 12 **Grace under pressure**  
*Luke Rittner, RAD Chief Executive*
- 14 **My revelation**  
*Sue Goodman, Step into Dance*
- 16 **Pursuing your dreams**  
*Arlene Phillips, RAD project patron*
- 18 **The Magnificent Seven**  
*Louise Murray, RAD Registered Teacher*
- 20 **Business as usual**  
*Valerie Guy, RAD Life Full Member*
- 22 **A dream come true**  
*Anatalia Hordov, Genée alumni*
- 24 **The chance to shine**  
*Julia Poyner, parent*
- 26 **You don’t choose tango...**  
*Monica Camara, RAD staff*
- 28 **Hunger and passion**  
*Li Cunxin, RAD Vice President*
- 30 **A tall (and short) story**  
*Kathryn Wade, Fellow of the RAD*
- 32 **Diving back into study**  
*Clare Wilders, RAD Faculty of Education graduate*
- 34 **Shakespeare and dance**  
*Samantha Smith, research student*
- 36 **Getting it**  
*Aiden Truss, RAD staff*
- 38 **Royal Academy of Dance**
- 40 **International offices**



# Royal Academy of Dance

*“What’s special about dance is there’s nothing like it... It’s movement, but then behind that movement you have personality, you can add your own flavour and it’s a way of telling someone ‘this is who I am’ and just showing what you’ve got.”*

Photo: Spiros Politis

Jamie Flatters, Step into Dance student

# Keeping it fresh

With dance the ever-changing art form that it is, it's no surprise that the RAD's membership magazine – *Dance Gazette* – has continued to change with it. As its strapline suggests, 'the dance magazine with attitude' has seen many stylistic and editorial changes since its launch over 85 years ago. The magazine strives to speak to and for its international membership. It is an authoritative voice of and for dance, and each issue sees inspiring, sensitive and sometimes hard-hitting stories come to fruition.

My role as the Editorial Assistant for *Dance Gazette* means I am at the forefront of dance as it shifts and leaps across visions, opinions and policies. I also see the fascinating wealth of history which shapes today's dance stories, whether personal or as part of the dance profession.

Writing in *Dance Gazette*, I cover new dance trends from around the world in my regular column, 'Crazy Fresh'. From contra dance to male belly dancing to bone-breaking, we take readers on journeys crossing the Atlantic to read about new US dance crazes, across to the Middle East and to some of the least likely and most interesting places where dance is felt.



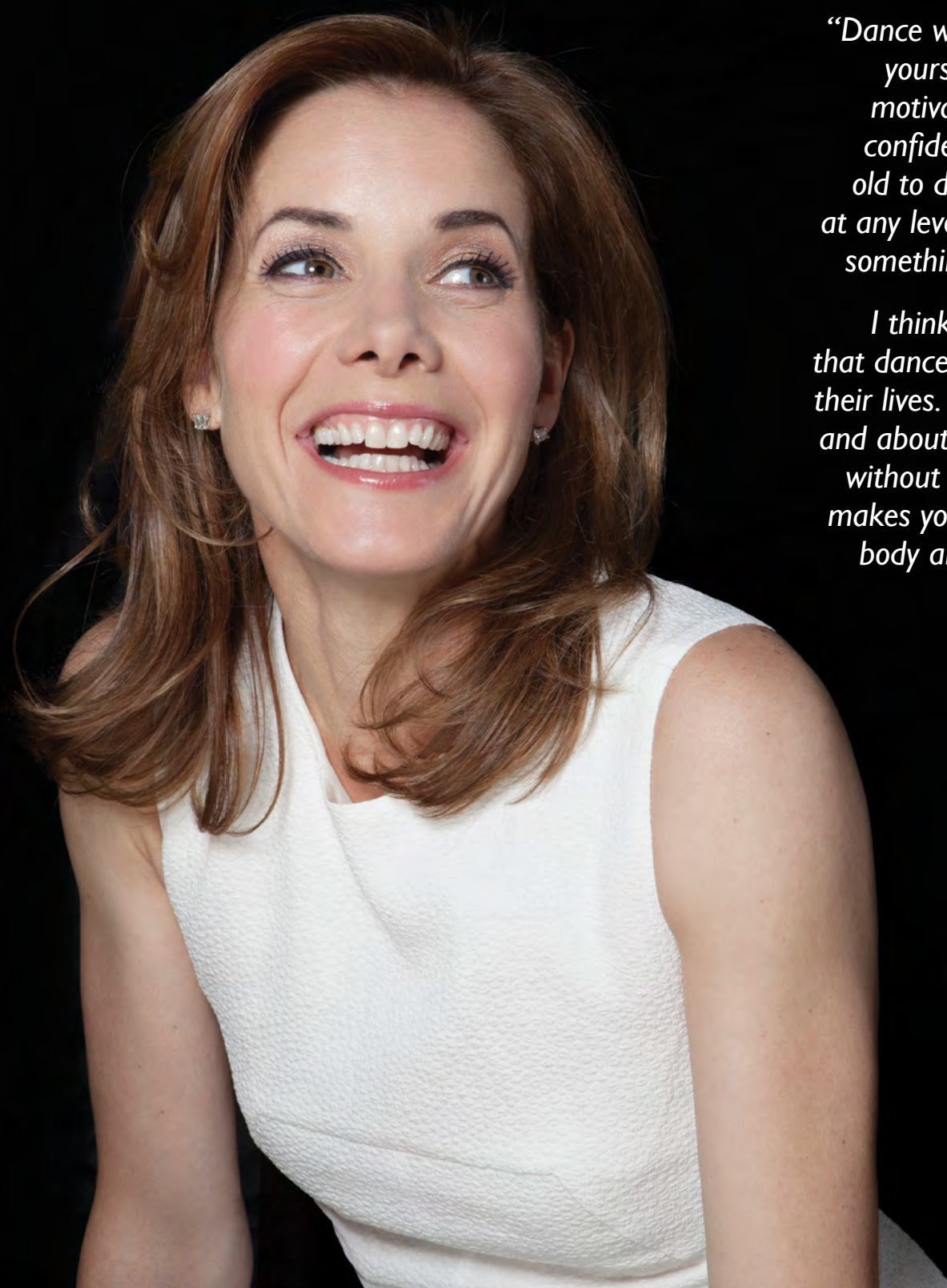
We've visited the big cities and the smallest dance communities that are developing the art form within their own culture. What is important to 'Crazy Fresh' is that I tell the story of new dance; what the craze is, why it is popular, where and how it is danced and by whom. In keeping with *Dance Gazette's* aims to cover the dance world in all its forms, my column has seen dancers waking up at dawn for a juice-fuelled rave, to the Passinho, whipping favelas up into frenzy as an antidote to the crime and the drug abuse in their neighbourhoods. We've also reported on the raqsat al-batriq, or the 'penguin dance', which has been kicking and hopping its way along the path of many rumoured origins, including the Letkajenkka.

Like our members – I hope – I still look forward to, and relish, each new issue of *Dance Gazette*. Through my column, the regular features and its passionate contributors, I am privileged to tell the story of dance through the eyes of the RAD.

*Jessica Wilson*, Dance Gazette Editorial Assistant

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*“Dance will tell you things about yourself; it has the power to motivate you and it gives you confidence. You are never too old to dance and you can do it at any level of ability and still get something worthwhile out of it.*

*I think people have forgotten that dance is meant to be part of their lives. Socially, it gets you out and about; physically it’s exercise without too much strain, and it makes you feel great about your body and happier in yourself.”*

**Darcey Bussell CBE  
RAD President**





We nurture and  
develop the next  
generation of  
dancers. Working  
in partnership with  
sponsors, foundations  
and donors, our  
bursaries bring dance  
to more people.

# Magic moments

I have been enjoying life as a choreologist for many years. I didn't really understand what I was getting myself into originally, but once I started down the path I was hooked. I remember feeling the wonder at being able to read a classical solo for the first time, and then being able to stand up and dance it from the notation. It was an amazing experience!

I also recall being asked to help with an RAD class and teaching from the notated syllabus for the first time. It was all so much quicker, easier and more accurate for me than having to teach from the written word. My notation skills meant that on one occasion, I was able to have a piece of updated additional notation for a score faxed to me from the other side of the world. I was then able to make the last minute changes and save the day. Moments like this seem magical.

It is always challenging because one is working with different companies, styles and languages. Each time I teach a ballet it thrills me to see it being interpreted by new talented dancers. My work has taken me around the globe and I have been fortunate to have worked with such wonderfully inspiring artists and on top of that, paid to do it, what more could one want?

One of the strangest encounters that I've had was on a trip to Santiago, Chile, where I had my first experience of an earthquake. This was, as you may imagine, a little bit frightening. Thankfully it didn't affect the capital so much, but we did feel the after shocks. One day I was rehearsing in a large studio in the theatre, beneath some very large and beautiful chandeliers. Suddenly, but quietly, the ballet master asked us all to leave the room. The chandeliers were gently swaying and had given us some warning!

Not knowing any better – and much to the dancers' amusement – I simply carried on giving corrections as we left the room. They were all very philosophical about the earthquakes, but thought it very funny that I had also adapted so calmly to the situation.

So here I am, thinking I'm retired, but then I am offered another exciting opportunity to work somewhere, doing the thing I love, and I just cannot resist the call. And so, once again I find myself packing my suitcase...

*Lyn Vella-Gatt, RAD Full Member, Al Chor*

Photo: Sweet Violets – Scene 1, The Camden Town Murder: choreography @ Liam Scarlett, London, 2012; notated by Gregory Mislin, 2012; score owner: The Royal Ballet

*“For Sophia, dance means  
fun, friends and fairies!”*

Jasmine and Sophia Cullingford,  
Family Class participants



Photo: Spiros Politis

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of Dance

# The creative thread



I've been Artistic Director of the RAD for 22 years. I have the responsibility for overseeing the development of the syllabi and for maintaining the high standards for which the Academy is known around the world. The weight of ballet history falls upon my shoulders and I feel very much the custodian of what the RAD stands for, and the principles established by our founders. But, my responsibility is very much to the future as well as the past. As such, one of my passions (and now a significant focus of the RAD's work) is encouraging teachers and students to develop their creative and choreographic skills, and to show them off in performance.

Primarily this has been possible through our flagship event, the Genée International Ballet Competition. In 2002 we introduced a major creative element with the first appointment of a 'Commissioned Choreographer' which allows candidates to benefit from working and rehearsing with an experienced choreographer. The Genée also now includes the 'Dancer's Own' element, which allows candidates, their teacher or a peer, to choreograph their own variation to their own choice of music. This, along with a dedicated 'Choreographic Award' has yielded a fascinating diversity of movement selection that has been hugely satisfying to see. And, where we originally had only one or two candidates creating their own variations for the competition, this number is growing year by year.

Photo: Marc Haegeman

Dancer's Own: Isaac Bowry, Semi-finalist, Genée 2014

We are continuing to build our portfolio of creative opportunities by encouraging our youngest students through our Solo Performance Awards, by including elements of choreography in the Genée and RAD Dance Challenges, and through introducing the 'Dancer's Own' element to some of our bursaries. Our newest competition, Moving North, encouraged dancers in a variety of styles to show off their creativity, and the annual Dance Proms sees us working with other organisations to celebrate and inspire innovation as well as providing the opportunity to perform in an iconic space.

It is through these events that we keep the creative thread going through all the age groups – building confidence, artistry and expression. We should never underestimate the power and benefits of creativity to performance – how many young people may be longing to express themselves through dance. Of course, there are also the benefits that this brings to their learning, development and achievement in exams.

I want to continue to develop and present more creative opportunities in the hope that teachers will enter more students for our various events. And, in giving those students the chance to express themselves through their performance and their own choreography, they will attain excellence and find real fulfilment through the art of dance.

*Lynn Wallis OBE, RAD Artistic Director*

Photo: Elliott Franks

Dancer's Own: Uyu Hiromoto, Finalist, Genée 2015 (RAD Full Member)



# Grace under pressure

As the Chief Executive of the RAD, I have been fortunate to travel around the world. With our flagship competition, the Genée now a truly global event, I have seen the passion for dance in some far flung places. What is the same wherever I go though is the special bond between teachers and their students – something I witnessed in an amazing scene in Singapore in 2009.



To raise funds for the Genée that year, two events were organised, a local Dance Challenge competition and a lavish gala dinner at the Shangri La Hotel. Our Artistic Director, Lynn Wallis, who had been the judge for the Dance Challenge, had invited the winners to perform at the dinner.

This was no small occasion. There were around 200 people in attendance, with Darcey Bussell as the guest of honour and corporate sponsors, RAD members and students present.

Among the performers was Thaddaeus Low, a 13-year-old boy, performing a solo dance to a recording of 'Amazing Grace' by Il Divo. He was part way through his routine when the CD stopped! Literally, without missing a beat, his teacher, Sharon Liew – followed by a group of dancers who were waiting their turn to perform – stepped forward, humming and singing the music for him in perfect time. He finished his dance and the diners were unaware that live singing wasn't a part of the piece.

I knew, however, that I'd seen something truly special. I don't mind admitting that I was moved to tears by the experience. And witnessing as I had, what was surely the epitome of the student-teacher relationship, I felt both humbled and proud.

I have since learned, to my great delight, that Thaddaeus has now graduated from the famous Rambert School of Ballet & Contemporary Dance here in the UK. The unstinting support of his teacher had obviously inspired him to pursue a career in dance, and I count myself blessed to have witnessed the strength of their connection.

*Luke Rittner, RAD Chief Executive*

Photo: Spiros Politis; graphic: Dmitriy Skorobogatov/Shutterstock

Our examiners are part of a worldwide community of trained dance professionals. The marks that they award have value across international borders and ensure that the



highest standards are maintained around the globe.

# My revelation



Before coming to the Step into Dance programme, I'd run my own professional dance company, as well as the movement department at a university drama school. I'd also taught at Elmhurst, London College of Dance and London Studio Centre, with 'proper' dance studios and live pianists, with highly motivated international students with good ballet training and discipline. So the idea of 'community dance' initially evoked images of the terrifyingly amateur, of musty halls, floors full of splinters, ill-fitting leotards, dance that isn't dance and poor presentation.

So what was I doing taking on this job?

It became my mission to change this perception. The first thing we did was to get good teachers on board. But we had to see them teach, not just look at their CVs. We also had to make it worth their while to work in often challenging circumstances with sometimes difficult children. We developed a programme which included strategies that would help our teachers cope with all eventualities and visited them in their schools to offer support when and as it was needed.

Above: The Lambeth Academy Step into Dance group perform at the Merton Borough Event 2015.

It was also important to fly the RAD flag. We too were pursuing excellence in our delivery in order to change the level and value of dance in schools. We found that this also broadened the appeal of the RAD, making it more accessible to those who had thought of it as an elitist organisation as it delivered many different dance genres and to a high standard.

An inspiring teacher is born and not made. They have a love and deep knowledge of their subject; they can dance, are musical and are keen to share their joy with others. They really live their dance. This dedication is a hallmark of all our dance artists.

After eight years in my role, I can now say that we have a pool of superb teachers that not only teach but also choreograph. They inspire our students and have helped many to go on to train at vocational dance schools and Centres for Advanced Training.

The RAD Student Activities department now regularly employs our teachers to deliver their courses and summer schools. I am very proud of this. Our staff have experienced the 'school of hard knocks' and come out as strong, creative, dependable and inspirational dance artists. The standard of our annual Step LIVE! showcase at Sadler's Wells rises every year, and our funding body is very happy with our work.

I feel that the stigma that I used to attach to 'community dance' has been laid to rest and that the notion is now something to be really proud of. We have at last become inclusive and diverse, something of which the RAD is justly proud.

*Sue Goodman, Step into Dance Programme and Artistic Director*

*Step into Dance is a schools' community dance programme run by the Royal Academy of Dance and funded by the Jack Petchey Foundation. It runs in 200 mainstream secondary, Pupil Referral Units and Special Educational Needs schools all over London and Essex.*





*“What does dance mean to me?  
Well... it’s my life.”*

Kate Swainston  
RAD Registered Teacher and Examiner

Royal  
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of Dance

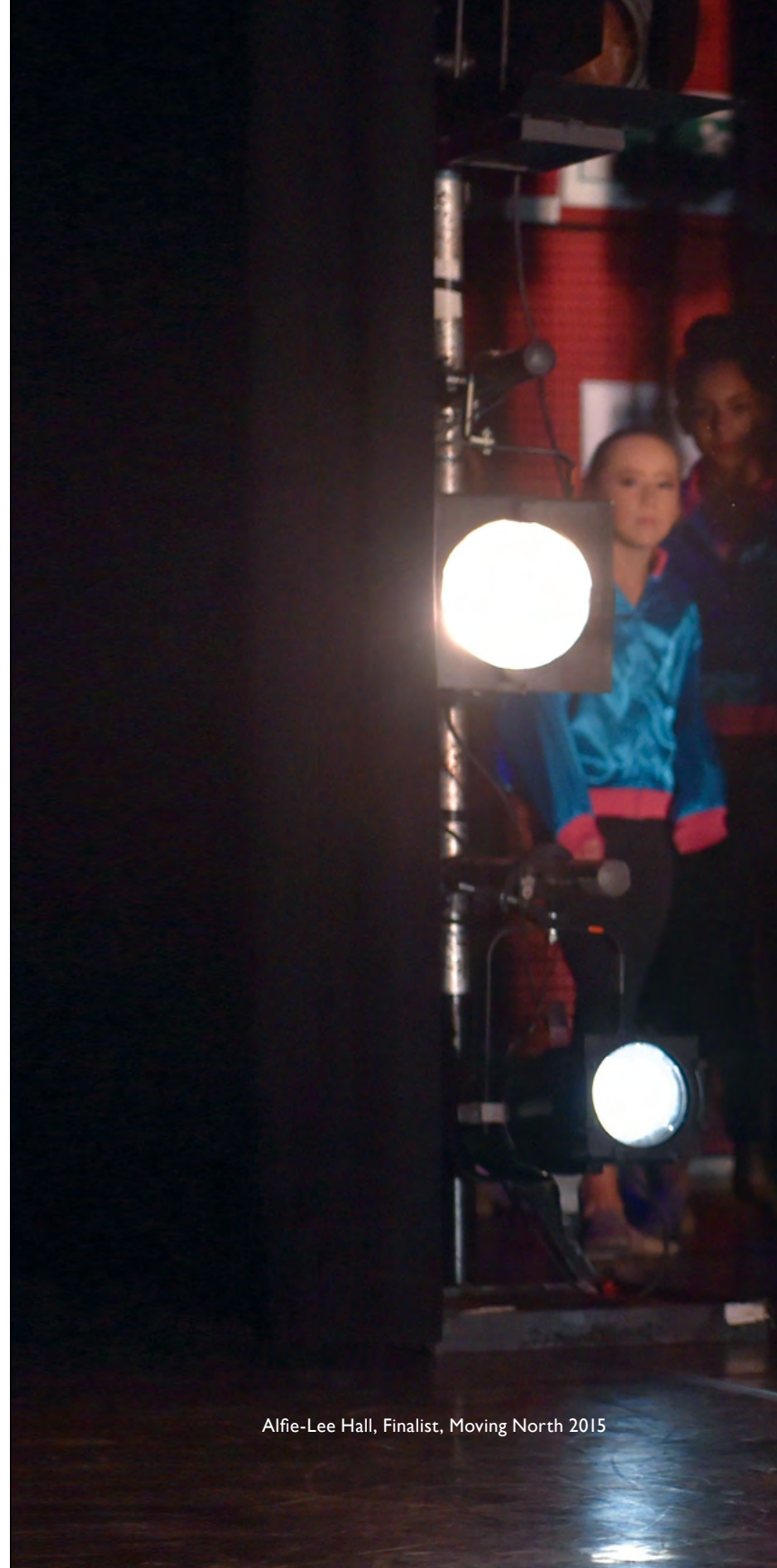
# Pursuing your dreams

A while ago I read Michaela DePrince's biography, *Taking Flight: From War Orphan to Star Ballerina*. Her story is one you'd be hard-pushed to match; she was orphaned at a young age in a war-torn Sierra Leone; malnourished, mistreated and either referred to as 'Number 27' or 'devil child' – an infantile name prompted by her vitiligo, a rare condition that affects the pigmentation of the skin. In her orphanage, however, Michaela saw a picture of a beautiful ballerina en pointe that inspired her to strive towards ultimately joining the Dutch National Ballet.

The dance world is full of similar stories. Li Cunxin was born into a poverty-stricken village in China where the peasants ate tree bark to survive. He is now the Artistic Director of Queensland Ballet. Carlos Acosta, a poor boy from Cuba, is now cited by many as the greatest male dancer of his generation. History is littered with stories of such far-reaching individuals. Though the tales vary, the majority hinge on having to leave home to make the most of a talent.



Photo: Paul Wolfgang Webster



Alfie-Lee Hall, Finalist, Moving North 2015



My own life story may not be as impressive as the examples I have given, but I do wonder what life would have held for me had I not left Salford. I was born in Salford and moved to Manchester as a small child. I grew up there studying Royal Academy of Dance ballet at a local school but didn't get the opportunity to study dance in a London school like most of my friends, as my mother passed away when I was 15 and I remained at home to help take care of my younger sister. Eventually I travelled to London to seek my fame and fortune in dance.

Winds of change are in the air though. The Royal Academy of Dance held its Moving North competition in Manchester at the end of 2015 after heats all across northern England. This attracted talented dancers within communities that normally would have to travel to the capital to get noticed. I love the idea that dancers could step onto that vital platform without wanting or needing to chase gold-paved streets in London, as many would not be able to get there in the first place.

And I want to read of more success stories; both of dancers who have travelled to pursue their dreams, and of those who have had the opportunity come to them through having the chance to take part in the regional and community events that the RAD provides.

*Arlene Phillips, RAD patron*

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# The Magnificent Seven

In 2011, thanks to the Royal Academy of Dance Facebook page, seven ladies from Stirling, Scotland, caused a bit of a stir around the world. Dubbed 'The Magnificent Seven', and with a combined age totalling 292 years, they attended the adult ballet class at the city's Monument Dance Centre. However, not just content with the fun and fitness their class provided, they decided to go a step further and sit their first ever ballet exams. Under the expert tuition of RAD teacher, Jonathan Burnett, they entered Grade 5 Ballet and gained six Distinctions and one Merit between them. As well as social media notoriety, their achievements also saw them being interviewed by BBC Radio Scotland. They even inspired another group of our ladies to enter the RAD Grade 4 examination, not quite so senior – and now of course nicknamed the 'Famous Five' – who were awarded four merits and a pass in November 2011.

The Magnificent Seven have continued to dance. In the November 2015 RAD exam session they entered the Grade 6 Ballet exam, this time gaining four Distinctions and three Merits with marks ranging from 64–81. There just seems to be no stopping them and we were all once again thrilled at their results. They really take their ballet seriously, as Jonathan recently observed, "We have a wonderful time in class. It's not just about exercise for the body; it's about the artistry of classical ballet and the mood and emotions suggested by the music."

Their dedication and hard work was once again justly rewarded when they were welcomed into the cast for the school's show, 'Dancing by Numbers' at the Macrobert Theatre in Stirling. The ladies performed on two evenings along with 700 youngsters aged from 3–23 and all in support of two cancer charities.

Monument Dance Centre in Stirling continues to run adult ballet classes every Thursday evenings with an Absolute Beginners Ballet class run by Jonathan on Wednesday evenings. Through these we hope to instil something of our Magnificent Seven's passion for dance and for achievement in all ages.

*Louise Murray, RAD Registered Teacher*

Share your [#myDance](#) story



Photo: Helen Peck (Fine & Dandy Photography)

Through projects such as RADiate  
and Step into Dance we are able  
to bring the benefits and  
fun of dance into schools  
to encourage and support  
children and young adults with  
special educational needs.



# Business as usual

**I've had a long and pleasurable association with the Royal Academy of Dance; I took my Grade 4 in 1935 but I first started teaching in 1941, during the war.**

In Jersey, we were under German occupation but luckily I had just got my Advanced RAD. My family were living in Grouville and at the time a friend of mine had three girls that learned dancing in St Helier but couldn't get there anymore due to the fact that there was no traffic – no buses, no cars. So they asked me if I'd teach them. I found a little hall and I started out with six girls. By the next week I had about 30 pupils and my career as a dance teacher had begun!

It was very difficult because back then food was always an issue and it was difficult to get into lessons. And you couldn't get materials or dancing shoes because we were cut off from England. Children used to come in slippers and their parents used to make things from old vests, and tunics out of old sheets, so it was quite an interesting time. I was very lucky as my parents had a shop and they had a lot of crepe paper, so we used that to decorate. And for one finale we had little dresses with red paper around the edges – and they looked quite attractive. You had to be more creative and your imagination had to go a long way in those days.

Kathleen Gordon was the secretary of the Royal Academy at the time, and as soon as the war was over, she sent me a lot of ballet shoes and things to start off, which was really very kind of her. I've always appreciated that.



We couldn't do exams of course – there was nobody to examine them. But we did try to keep things 'business as usual' on the island, and I approached teaching in the way my teacher, Noreen Bush, taught me. And the Germans had nothing at all to do with the actual running of the business. We did, however, have to send them the programme or itinerary if we were doing a show for instance. And, at my first show, the German Commandant insisted on coming – we even had to have a special seat for him. When it was all over I was called to Government House – asked to report at 9 o'clock on Monday morning. I was terrified!

I had to cycle there and all the way, thought I was going to be put in jail for having done something I shouldn't. But all they wanted to do was to congratulate me. The Germans said that they'd never seen anything like it in Germany, with all the children dancing, and they wanted to know all about it. As I came away they even gave me a bottle of something to drink. I was quite relieved!

It was a wonderful time, a hard time, but I was fortunate enough. I lived in the country and the children couldn't get into town for their lessons so they came to me and it was really lovely. And when the occupation finished I had a really good school, with over 100 pupils, so it wasn't worth going back to do anything else.

In 1943 I opened my first dance school in St Helier and two years later moved to David Place, where the Jersey Academy of Dancing has remained for more than 60 years.

*Valerie Guy, RAD Life Full Member*

*“Dance has enabled Caseley to excel in confidence and communication despite his vocal dyspraxia. His coordination, balance, rhythm and overall physical ability have noticeably improved.”*

Nikki Bartley, mother of Caseley Frederick  
Step into Dance student

Royal  
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of Dance



# A dream come true



My name is Anatalia Hordov, and I am 16 years old. I trained at the Santa Clarita Ballet Academy in California from the age of three and completed all my RAD exams from Grade 1 through Advanced 2. Thanks to my RAD technique and the dedicated instruction I received at Santa Clarita Ballet, I was one of 12 students chosen to study at the Colburn Dance Academy in their inaugural class. This programme is under the direction of Jenifer Ringer and artistic direction of Benjamin Millepied. In 2015, I placed third in the Senior Women's Classical category at the Youth America Grand Prix and proceeded to compete at the finals in New York, where I received a scholarship to Staatsballett Berlin.

Growing up, my RAD teacher, Corinne Glover, always spoke of the prestigious Genée International Ballet Competition, but never did I think I would one day be there. So, it was a dream come true when I found out that I had received the Darcey Bussell Bursary to attend the Genée in London.

The whole Genée experience is one I will never forget. It was such an honour to meet Dame Monica Mason, Darcey Bussell, and all of the amazing teachers, and to get to perform at the Final at Sadler's Wells. I have made friendships that will last a lifetime. I particularly loved getting to work with the incredible up-and-coming choreographer, Charlotte Edmonds. It is a time I will treasure forever.

Since competing at the Genée, I was chosen to perform Jerome Robbins' *Interplay* at Benjamin Millepied's benefit for his company, L.A. Dance Project. Additionally, I have been offered a scholarship to attend San Francisco Ballet's Summer Intensive and was invited to take class with the company where I was offered a trainee position.

I am so excited to see where my journey will lead, and I know for a fact I would not be where I am today without my RAD training and the experience I gained at the Genée. I hope one day to dance again in London, and would like to thank the RAD for all they have done for me and for their constant support.

*Anatalia Hordov, Finalist, Genée 2015*





# The chance to shine

In 2005 my daughter Abby began her dancing life; aged three, she joined the pre-school class at Bramhall School of Dancing in Stockport, England, and loved it! Always wanting to wear the correct uniform and to have her hair done properly, she was thrilled to take part in her Pre-Primary presentation class in 2008 and the school's show that year.

It was around this time, however, that the difficulties Abby faced at school became more apparent, as the gap between her and her peers widened. And, in 2009, she was diagnosed with autism.

Her real passion for dance continued but her behaviour in class was unreliable and sometimes extremely disruptive. Matters came to a head at a presentation class that summer and we left with heavy hearts, realising that, out of fairness to the other pupils, this was probably the end of Abby's dance lessons.

But, the school's principal contacted us to offer a solution: Abby was to be given individual tuition in ballet while continuing with her group National class. Within a term the progress she made was phenomenal. And, by the time of her next performance, Abby was confident enough to step out on stage and open the show!

Abby continued with her personal classes through the RAD Grade 1 and 2 syllabi and we obtained letters from doctors and specialists so we could notify the RAD of her condition. She entered for class awards rather than the Graded exams, meaning that the stress was removed for her and she could simply delight in her achievements each time that she received her certificates.

Eventually, we felt that she was ready to re-join her classmates for the Grade 3 ballet class. In 2014, she performed with them in their next show and later took her Grade 3 class award. The circle was completed when Abby entered for the full Grade 4 exam.



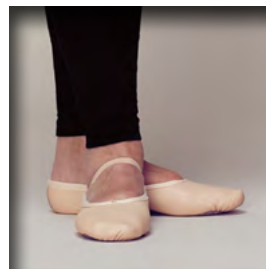
Photo: courtesy of Julia Poyner

Dancing has brought so much to Abby's life. Her spatial awareness is far greater than that of most on the autistic spectrum and performing has brought such joy to her. She has carried her flair over into her school life taking on major roles in plays and productions. She never gets stage-fright and remembers not only her own parts but usually those of everyone else too, making her an excellent prompter!

Abby would truly not be the remarkable, self-assured young lady she is today without dancing. She has greater confidence academically and is more prepared to try new things and to persevere to achieve her full potential. Through dance, Abby now knows how brightly she can shine.

*Julia Poyner*

Through the Faculty  
of Education, dance  
teachers have access  
to high-quality  
education and  
training for teaching  
in the 21st century.





# You don't choose tango...

Nearly seven years ago I decided to go to my first dance lesson. I'd been working in the Examinations department at the RAD for a while, and realised that not having any dance experience myself was no longer an option. Also, I could see how our students carried themselves so gracefully around the building and I wanted to be part of that too.

Having your very first dance lesson as an adult can be daunting to say the very least, with the fear of ridicule, missing out on the steps or tripping over. However, having a group of friends with me at my first lesson really helped. I was not as fearless as a child is naturally towards new experiences, but the enthusiasm and joy of movement were soon firmly established.

It is often said that you don't choose tango, tango chooses you. And, after trying out different dance styles, I found myself drawn to Argentine tango. It suited my Portuguese sensibility with its melancholy sounds, plaintive singing and hint of nostalgia. I also soon found out that it was very unlike its superficial TV portrayal – it is so much more!

Tango beautifully encompasses the human experience. In the digital age, the way we communicate has changed and slowly we are losing that human touch. When dancing tango, that element, that bond, is reinstated. Very quickly you find that the embrace, one of the most important components of tango, brings you closer; not just to your partner, but to your true self. It's not the ultra-flicky, all-consuming lustful dance with lifts and stern expressions. No. Tango smiles; tango teases; tango whispers; tango heals; tango embraces; tango transforms; tango simmers. It's a slow-burning and long-lasting fire; tango lures you in when you are feeling low.

I recall one Friday afternoon after leaving the office, I found myself walking past a nearby studio. When I heard someone play the notes of a familiar tango song on the piano, it stopped me in my tracks. My heart leapt, my face lit up and all I wanted to do was dance! It was there and then I understood that tango was now very much part of me.

Working at the RAD provided me with the opportunity and the confidence that allowed me to express myself through movement, and led me to my love of the tango. Cheers RAD!

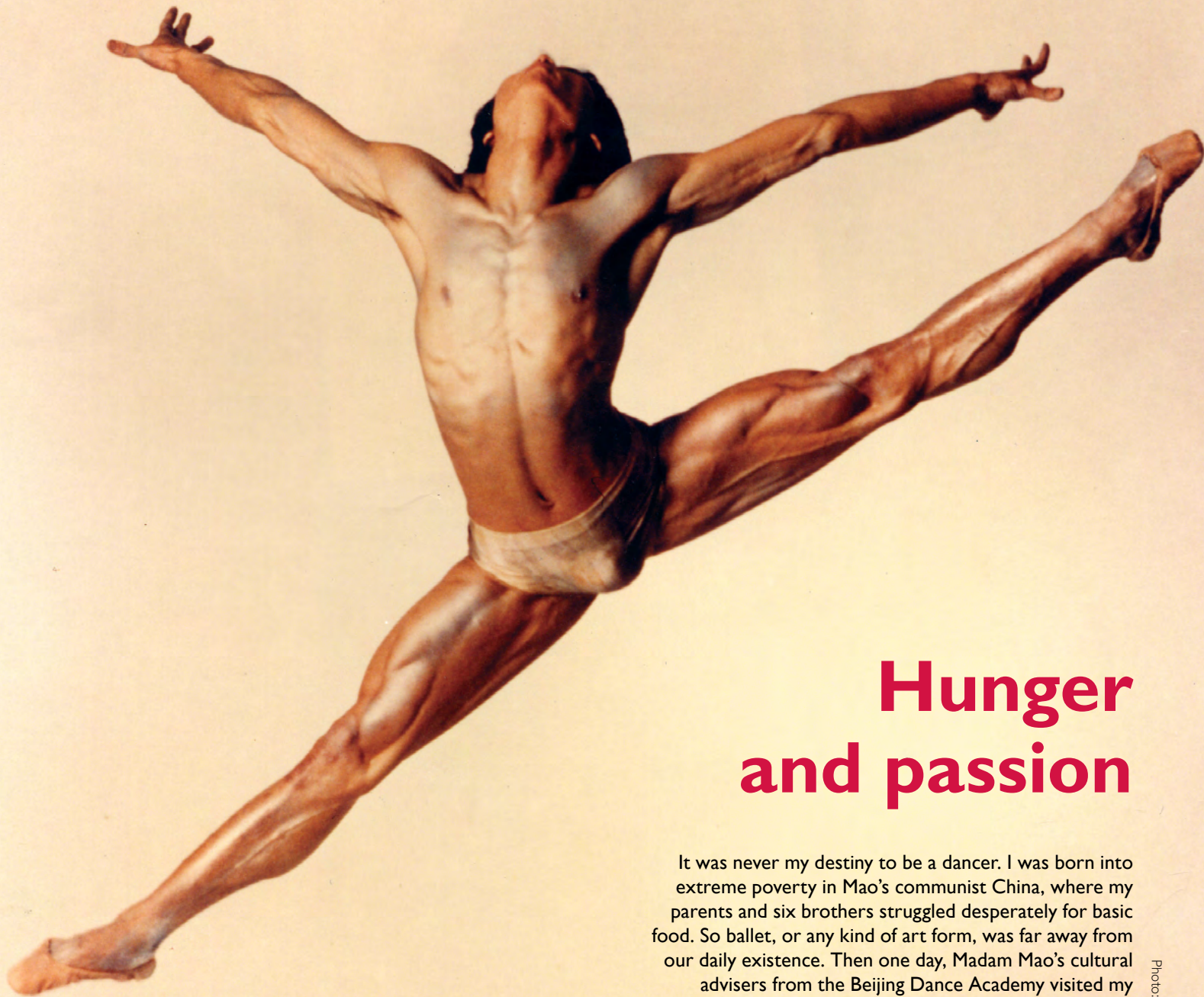
*Monica Camara, RAD Examinations Results Officer*



Royal  
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*“Dancing, for me, means I can relax and totally be myself. I came very late in life to dancing and I absolutely love it.”*

Sally Osborn, Silver Swans dancer



## Hunger and passion

It was never my destiny to be a dancer. I was born into extreme poverty in Mao's communist China, where my parents and six brothers struggled desperately for basic food. So ballet, or any kind of art form, was far away from our daily existence. Then one day, Madam Mao's cultural advisers from the Beijing Dance Academy visited my primitive commune school and discovered me, amongst millions of children across China, offering a full scholarship to go to Beijing to study ballet. I joined 43 other students on a 20-hour train journey that would change my life forever.

Photo: Houston Ballet

My training at the Beijing Dance Academy was hard, disciplined. We started at 5.30am and went to sleep at 9pm, six days a week for seven years. I was hopeless for the first couple of years. I hated almost everything, especially ballet! The only thing I liked was the food. On the verge of being fired, a new ballet teacher came into my life, we called him Teacher Xiao. He was different to other teachers. He was kind, passionate about ballet, tough but fair. His passion for ballet was contagious and inspirational. He changed my attitude, making me realise that I had the potential to become a good dancer, and, in return, could help my family's survival, which was a big childhood dream of mine. He also kindled my own passion for ballet.

Passion is the most important thing in achieving one's best. Passion made me work harder than most; passion made me hungry and drove me to pursue perfection and excellence, to catch up to my classmates and to improve. I often woke up at 5am or earlier to practice, hopping one-legged with sandbags strapped to my ankles, pirouetting in candlelight to gain muscle strength for jumping and turning. I did this for years, and my hard work paid off when I graduated as one of the top dancers in China.

The first cultural delegation arrived in China around the time of my graduation in 1979 and the Artistic Director of Houston Ballet, Ben Stevenson, was invited to teach a couple of master classes at our academy. He subsequently offered two scholarships to study at the Houston Ballet Academy's Summer School that year and I received one.



My experience was incredible. Ben taught every day and I learned so much from him in six weeks. The most valuable realisation was the importance of music and the freedom in dance. Ben became my mentor and after offering me the opportunity to replace an injured dancer, employed me as a soloist, promoting me to Principal the following year. I got to work with some of the most inspiring choreographers. I toured and guest-performed with many companies around the world. My dance career rewarded me and enriched my life beyond my wildest dreams.

Reflecting on my life in ballet, I realised that it all started with my wonderful seven years of disciplined learning and training at the Beijing Dance Academy. The inspirational teachers have had a profound impact, shaping my career success. I couldn't imagine any of my achievements without those formative years. I'm passionate about good dance training and education, and I'm very pleased with my association and involvement with RAD.

*Li Cunxin, Artistic Director of Queensland Ballet and RAD Vice President*

Facing page: Li Cunxin in Houston Ballet's *The Rite of Spring*, 1985;  
Left: Taking company class at Queensland Ballet;  
Above: With Mary McKendry in Ben Stevenson's *Sleeping Beauty*

# A tall (and short) story



Dance, particularly classical ballet, has been a major part of my life. I was fortunate to have had a teacher in Karachi who had been a student of Adeline Genée and had danced with Phyllis Bedells, so the RAD became very important to me when I was a child.

She suggested that I should audition for The Royal Ballet School and my parents agreed. Much to their surprise I was accepted, though I did have to negotiate an agreement with them that I would succeed academically as well as loving my dancing, or they would remove me and send me to boarding school in Edinburgh!

I was awarded the Adeline Genée Gold Medal (now, the Genée International Ballet Competition) when I was in my final year in Dame Ninette de Valois' class, and was then accepted into The Royal Ballet company. I had the great good fortune to visit many countries. We were paid a pittance but lived well and enjoyed performing an amazing repertoire. Having rehearsals with Ashton and MacMillan, as well as being in new creations, ensured I was never bored. Being of medium height I was pushed up and down the corps de ballet lines and was cast in both tall and short roles. The best advice I was given at this time was "learn roles for which you are not cast..." This meant that I was rushed on in many roles, and gained a reputation for being reliable. Of course, having 'saved the day' when I was pushed on in a ballet, the least the ballet master could do was to give me a rehearsal and extra performances!

I always believe I was so fortunate to have danced during the era when Dame Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev were Principals. The whole company was comprised of amazing artists with whom to perform, and such lovely people with so many hilarious tales when they were just being fellow dancers.

When I stopped performing I started teaching at The Royal Ballet School. This was thanks to Kenneth MacMillan, who encouraged me not to leave the dance world. It was then that I discovered my love of teaching. This also meant that I have travelled extensively and have had the honour of being on the juries of several ballet competitions.

I was invited to become a Trustee of the RAD, served on the Artistic Committee and became Chairman of the Benesh Committee. In 2016 I was awarded a Fellowship of the RAD which is a huge honour and I am delighted that my association with the Academy will continue.

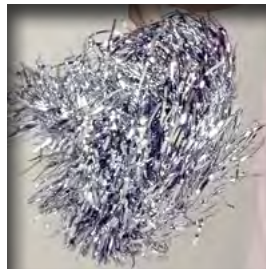
I have been so very lucky!

**Kathryn Wade**, RAD Fellow (FRAD)

Left: Kathryn Wade in Peter Wright's *Giselle*, c1973.



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to perform and to make  
new friends.

# Diving back into study

In 2014, I embarked on the RAD's Professional Dancers' Teaching Diploma (PDTD). As a former professional dancer, I had taken a detour and had spent the previous eight years working as a diving instructor in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt. Having discovered that I loved teaching I realised that I might have something to offer the dance world.

I chose the PDTD as it acknowledged the experience that I had gained in the course of my own career. I was also able to complete the entire programme over an intensive three months at RAD headquarters in London. So feeling slightly apprehensive, I bid a temporary farewell to my husband (and the cat) and hopped on a plane.

Over the next three months I found myself taught by some fabulous RAD tutors guiding me through the syllabus, as well as learning about modern day teaching approaches. We learned strategies to help students with different learning styles, and classroom management techniques for various age groups. I also discovered the art of research, and how to find the answers to questions on anatomy, childhood development and even CV writing. And, I was given career advice on the different avenues available to me, such as teaching in primary and secondary schools, working with older adults, and bringing dance into the wider community.

Shortly after graduating, we returned to the UK, where I was invited to join The Right Step Dance Company. There I further developed my teaching skills to include their Active Armchairs programme (seated classes for older adults in care homes) and their cross-curricular dance programme (bringing dance into the classroom to enhance learning). With them I have had some incredibly rewarding experiences where people struggling with mobility in later life have actually improved their strength enough to ditch their cane, and where dementia sufferers have been taken back to their younger days.

A month later, I was also offered a ballet teaching position at the Hasland Dance Studios in Herne Bay, Kent. There I have taught the RAD syllabus at Primary level all the way up to Advanced Foundation and have had the opportunity to really put into practice so much of what I learned on the PDTD programme.

As for the future, who knows? I recently teamed up with a fellow dance teacher to set up the Bridge Academy of Performing Arts in Rochester, bringing RAD classes to local children. I continue to teach across the genres, bridging both community dance and private dance schools. Each venture brings its own rewards, and every day brings a new challenge.

*Clare Wilders* RAD Registered Teacher  
(graduate of Professional Dancers' Teaching Diploma)

# Royal Academy of Dance



*“I love dance because it’s super-cool!  
My favourite part of the class is making  
a circle. I like the pre-jeté because I get  
to do a curtsey.”*

Ruby Haynes, Pre-Primary in Dance student

# Shakespeare and dance





Photos: GBL Wilson/Royal Academy of Dance/ArenaPAL; RAD Archive

My dance story is perhaps a little different to others, as my contact with the RAD came via the Philip Richardson Library at its headquarters in London. This was a wonderful resource when I was writing my master's thesis for the 'Shakespeare in History' programme at University College London.

For my thesis, I analysed narrative similarities between Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Ashton's *The Dream*. During my visit to the RAD library, I found many enormously helpful research materials including original programmes from the 1962 premiere of Balanchine's ballet in New York City and the 1964 premiere of Ashton's ballet in London. A video of Violette Verdy and Edward Villella coaching younger dancers in a pas de deux from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was also extremely helpful.

The primary resources I found at the Philip Richardson Library contributed considerably to my research for my thesis, demonstrating for me that the Royal Academy of Dance is not only an internationally recognised centre for ballet dancers and teachers but for academic researchers as well.

I first learned about the RAD when I was a young dancer studying ballet in the United States, so it was an absolute pleasure to come to the RAD in person in London.

*Samantha Smith*, research student

Share your [#myDance](#) story

Left: Antoinette Sibley (later Dame Antoinette Sibley, President of the RAD) and Alexander Grant in Ashton's *The Dream*, 1970; Inset: premiere programme covers of Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1962, New York City, and Ashton's *The Dream*, 1964, London.

# Getting it

I'm not a dancer, I'm a copywriter. I joined the RAD on a six-month contract nearly three years ago and ended up staying. Before this, I had very little knowledge of dance. I love literature, the visual arts and music in their various forms, but having two left feet, a touch-and-go sense of rhythm and a shape that doesn't fit easily into a tutu, I'd steered clear of anything vaguely terpsichorean.

As any copywriter will tell you though, you have to quickly get up to speed in the area in which you work and become, if not a subject matter expert, then at least familiar with the names, the terminology and the milieu. But working at the RAD this all happens almost by osmosis. You are surrounded by people who don't just show up to work from 9–5. They take dance classes in their lunch breaks. They take classes after work. Some teach in the evenings too. Others spend their weekends running schools and events or organising fundraising. And, you can't help but pick up on their infectious passion.

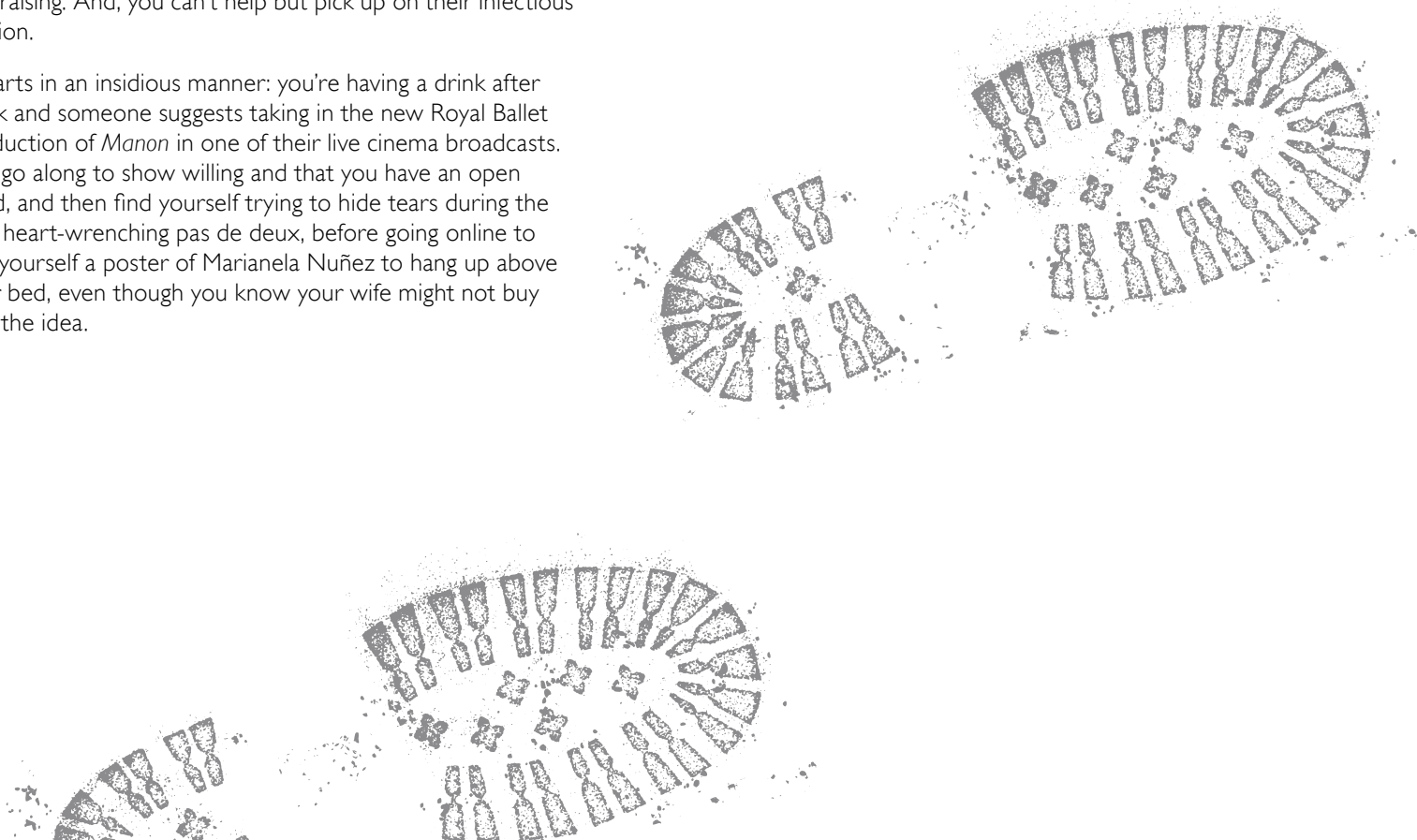
It starts in an insidious manner: you're having a drink after work and someone suggests taking in the new Royal Ballet production of *Manon* in one of their live cinema broadcasts. You go along to show willing and that you have an open mind, and then find yourself trying to hide tears during the final heart-wrenching pas de deux, before going online to buy yourself a poster of Marianela Nuñez to hang up above your bed, even though you know your wife might not buy into the idea.

Next thing, you boast about knowing the difference between a first and a second arabesque and hold forth on your preference for MacMillan's style over Balanchine's or your appreciation of the wit of Ashton's choreography. And you're watching more and more of Sky Arts' programming to learn about Margot Fonteyn or the Bolshoi Ballet.

And you begin to get it.

You start to see what others see in dance, what it means to them and how it's not just something that they do: it's something that they are. Whether they are performing classical ballet variations, musical theatre or krumping, getting back into dancing at 70, or are youngsters who can't communicate with other children but whose faces light up with delight in their dance classes at school – you just get it.

*Aiden Truss, RAD Copywriter*



The Genée is one of the most prestigious ballet competitions in the world. It attracts the finest RAD-trained dancers



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Spiros Politis

Front: Lucinda Strachan, Silver Medallist, Genée 2014,  
Antwerp (Lucinda appears by kind permission of  
Samira Saidi, English National Ballet School)

Back: Ama Asiedu, Step into Dance teacher



# Royal Academy of Dance



Photo: Spiros Politis

*“There’s no other option for me.  
There’s nothing else I could do: dance is it.”*

Lucinda Strachan, Genée Medallist, 2014 (RAD Full Member)

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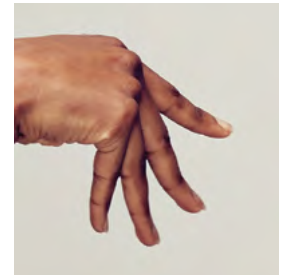
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