

THE DIRECTORS TALK ABOUT SUMMER STUDY IN PREPARATION FOR A CAREER IN DANCE

Once a student has a firm grasp on intermediate level technique, they are ready to begin considering their future, and which options may suit their talents and work ethic. Our Directors have a lifetime of experience with summer programs, trainee programs and professional companies. When a student has reached the Level V course at The Studio, they are considered solid enough to audition for big summer programs.

By “big”, we mean “big”: costly, more students, faculty with recognizable names. Many times these programs lead to long-term relationships, trainee contracts and eventually professional dancer contracts. Yes, you can make a living being a dancer! You have to have the right work ethic, training, talent and physicality, but we know — after many years of experience — that the main ingredient is YOUR DESIRE. Which means, if you are absolutely committed to your training, you can make it happen.

Sadly, going to a big program does not ensure good training. There are several well-known programs associated with excellent companies which actually offer poor training, huge classes, nonexistent out-of-the-studio guidance, or all of the above. Not every student needs 24-hour chaperoning, but don't you want to know that your child is being taken care of responsibly? This is one reason the Directors recommend the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet Summer Program as a first program away from home: a good dormitory situation. The training at CPYB is no-nonsense excellent training, and that is the best reason to go away for the summer.

After years of having students return from different programs, our Directors have first-hand experience of which programs make better dancers, or at least, enhance The Studio's solid training. CPYB and Houston Ballet have produced the most consistent returns. Students return from these programs stronger and more enthusiastic. Other schools have worked well for some students and not others. Still other programs are too new to judge in a sweeping gesture for everyone. Members of Santa Cruz Ballet Theatre Senior Company can talk with the Directors about which programs will be best for them.

Except for CPYB, auditions are required for entrance to big summer programs. If you are in Level V or above, talk with the Directors about attending auditions. For other students — those in Levels IV and under, or students who are looking to college instead of an immediate dance career — stay home and attend our wonderful Summer Programs, developed especially for our students' growth.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINEE PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Like most things in our world, getting a job with a professional ballet company has changed dramatically over the past few years. It used to be that a talented and driven student would graduate from high school (or even finish early) and immediately get a contract with a professional company. This rarely happens anymore.

There are several factors responsible for the changes: the most vivid is the reduction in government and big business support of the arts in our society. Many companies have either cut back on the number of dancers they employ, or they have gone out of business altogether. However, the number of dancers being trained has not diminished. So the balance between the number of available jobs and the number of qualified dancers has created a fiercely competitive field.

Due mainly to this competition factor, companies now have entry level positions such as Trainees and Apprentices or members of a second company. Typically a young dancer will serve one or two years in each level of employment. Some companies have paid positions at entry levels, and some do not. These entry years serve both the company's artistic staff and the dancer as a lengthy “audition” period. The artistic directors can have the chance to see how the dancer fits in, whether they learn quickly, how reliable they are, what kind of work ethic they possess and whether they are able to assimilate the different styles of dance the company performs, as well as what kind of performer the dancer is; attributes which are not always obvious after a single audition class. At the same time, the dancer is able to make the same judgements for him or herself about the company he is training or starting with.

Our graduates have worked in these types of positions in Pacific Northwest Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, Ballet Austin, Cincinnati Ballet, Tulsa Ballet, Sacramento Ballet, Utah Regional Ballet, Richmond Ballet and Netherlands Dance Theatre in Holland. Some of these companies supply the dancer with shoes and/or a weekly stipend or paycheck. Each differs dramatically.

If you are a sophomore or junior in high school, and want to pursue a career in the field, the best thing to do is speak with our directors about which opportunities might suit you. They will help you decide about where to audition, as well as help you prepare photos, resumé and class or performing footage when required. There are also wonderful college and university dance programs now, which can also help you prepare for a career in the field. Start taking note of your aspirations and we will help you achieve your goals!