

To The Pointe...

A newsletter produced by the Mercyhurst University Dance Department.

Letter from the Dance Chair



It has been a very full year as we turned the corner to become the Mercyhurst University Dance Department. As you will see from these pages, we have been more than busy with performances, outreach and service.

In addition to our guest choreographers and master teachers, we were also inspired by the return of alumni Justin Hogan ('09) and Pamela Swaney ('06) from St. Louis Ballet and Lauren Stenroos ('09) from Dayton Ballet. I received many comments on the premiere of the contemporary duet "Coming to Terms" that Justin choreographed and danced with Pam so beautifully. Lauren performed with guest artist Justin Koertgen, also from

Dayton Ballet, in the virtuoso pas de deux "Diana and Actéon." Lastly Pam graced us with a heart-rending "Dying Swan." The dance majors cranked it up a notch to keep up with the guest artists and not one dance major disappointed in this awesome performance.

It is bittersweet as we say goodbye to the class of 2012. These seniors have had a challenging two years dealing with the tragic loss of classmate Jenni-Lyn Watson, but they have led by example to heal the entire department by staying unified and positive. This class will be remembered as one of both strength and compassion.

You will read later about the amazing work of our clubs but I was particularly proud to receive the Sister Rita Panciera Campus Ministry Service Award. Sr. Rita founded Campus Ministry and was there on Sunday, April 29, to shake my hand when I accepted the award on behalf of the department. Greg Baker, Director of Campus Ministry, presented the award plaque to the entire department at the awards ceremony and it will hang in the danceSpace next year in recognition of this honor and the 2,222 service hours completed by dance majors in '11-'12.

Mercyhurst Center for Dance Education offers students interested in dance therapy the opportunity to work with Patrick Corbin in classes, rehearsals, lectures and practicum experiences this summer with the Patrick Corbin Dancers and with special needs children at the Barber National Institute. In addition, four faculty and five dance majors will travel to Austria to perform in five premieres for Young! Tanzsommer festivals in Innsbruck, Salzburg and St. Johannes.

Enjoy your summer and keep up with us on Facebook and our blog.

Tauna Hunter, Dance Chair

Special Interest

Articles:

- Cameron Basden Residency
- Project Dance
- Interview with Megan Dunphy
- AC DFA/YAGP
- A Year in Review: Department Clubs

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CAMERON BASDEN RESIDENCY

By Chelsea Robicheau



Photo courtesy of
Interlochen Center for the Arts

Spring term has brought with it warmer weather, blue skies, and a renewed vigor felt by all on the Mercyhurst campus. The Dance Department has embraced the change of season with a lively, rehearsal packed atmosphere. Dancers are currently preparing for *Viva la Danse*, a performance that promises to celebrate the joy of the summer months and demonstrate the strength and growth that the dancers have achieved during the year.

One of the pieces on the *Viva la Danse* program is an excerpt from *Viva Vivaldi*. Choreographed by Gerald Arpino for the Joffrey Ballet in 1965, the piece is fast-paced, exciting, and light hearted. Mercyhurst dancers cast in *Viva Vivaldi* were granted the opportunity to work with Cameron Basden. Ms. Basden was one of Gerald Arpino's original muses and spent endless one-on-one hours in the studio with him, working through movement quality and choreographic ideas that would later achieve great success on stage. Ms. Basden serves as the main repetiteur for the Gerald Arpino Foundation and stages his ballets around the country.

During her weeklong residency on campus, Ms. Basden reached out to students not only through rehearsals but also in the multiple classes she taught. As a teacher she emphasized attention to detail coupled with artistic expression that carried over into her rehearsals. Ms. Basden also gave an exclusive dance lecture that covered her experiences as a professional dancer and the excitement of being able to work so closely with such an innovative choreographer and director like Mr. Arpino. She also gave advice for dancers in the process of auditioning, drawing on her experience as Ballet Master for the Joffrey Ballet and her current position as Director of Dance at the Interlochen Center for the Arts.

Ms. Basden's presence within the danceSpace was one of quiet but intense influence, and her calm demeanor inspired students to succeed not only for her but for themselves as well. As teacher and rehearsal mistress alike, she demonstrated why she was so admired by Mr. Arpino and spoke to her continued success in the dance world.

“LAST CALL”

by: Megan Lawrence

This Spring’s *Viva la Danse* production includes an important landmark for one of our dance faculty here in the Space. Ms. Solveig Santillano will be debuting her first original work for the Mercyhurst Dancers, titled “Last Call.” The piece focuses on a going-away party at a bar for a soldier bound for duty, played by sophomore William Dula. Santillano says she had been very excited to choreograph to the music of k.d. lang for a long time, and that she let the music inspire the choreography. “Ultimately,” she says, “the dancing will offer a window into the lives of a group of people dealing with the joys and sorrows that are a part of all of our lives.”

The relatively small cast also had much input in developing characters which carry the plot of “Last Call.” “It’s really interesting to see Solveig capture the specialties and personalities of each dancer and allow them to add to their own character. The dance definitely has a different feel from some of the technical ballet work we’ve

done.” This was the first time working with Santillano outside of a classroom setting for the entire cast, and has been a learning experience for



all involved. Both the cast and choreographer hoped to make a notable performance in the show and offer a new type of work to the Mercyhurst repertoire.

PROJECT DANCE

by: Eliza Davidson

On April 19-22, five Mercyhurst University dance majors traveled to New York City to perform as part of Project Dance, accompanied by faculty member Noelle Partusch. Project Dance, founded in 2002, hosts events in more than 20 cities but began in New York shortly after 9/11.

The eight-hour car ride was well worth it for students Tess Sinke, Ashley Cook, Abby Savage,

Katherine Boatright and William Dula to have a chance to perform in Times Square before an audience of millions. The students performed three times in one day alongside prominent liturgical dance companies from across the United States. They danced “Work in Progress” choreographed by Noelle Partusch and excerpts from “Lord Look Down” choreographed by Tess Sinke. Their performance

day lasted from 9 a.m. till 5 p.m.

On Sunday the students took master classes for five hours from the directors of the Liturgical and Worship Dance companies involved in the event. When asked about the trip, the students were very pleased and enthusiastic about the exposure they gained and chance to enjoy in the city.

MOVING AS ONE

by Emily Reed



Martin Lofsnes Master Class

Dancers cast in *6-1* had no idea what to expect when Martin Lofsnes and Vernon Scott of 360° Dance Company came March 16-20 to set the piece. 360° Dance Company was started by Martin Lofsnes in 2006 and is composed mostly of former principal dancers from the Martha Graham Company. The piece *6-1* itself was choreographed in 2010 by Lofsnes and is described as a convergence of stillness and rapid dynamic movement, while asking the dancers to work as one unit throughout its entirety. The cast was in for a grueling five days where they had to learn the entire nine-minute dance in just 22 hours.

Vernon Scott, director of development for the company, came first to teach phrases of choreography and prepare the dancers for Martin Lofsnes' arrival the following day. Scott trained at Juilliard and danced for a variety of companies including Pilobolus, Mark Morris, and an extensive period with Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, where he served as rehearsal coordinator. When Lofsnes arrived, he wasted no time in getting to work. Lofsnes grew up in Norway and studied at the London Contemporary Dance School/The Place, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and the Martha Graham School, and was later a principal in the Martha Graham Company until 2006. He currently is the artistic director of 360° Dance Company as well as a teacher at the Ailey School. The dancers did not fail to deliver and worked very hard on perfecting the piece in a short amount of time. Mark Santillano also attended the entire residency so he could run rehearsals after the residency ended.

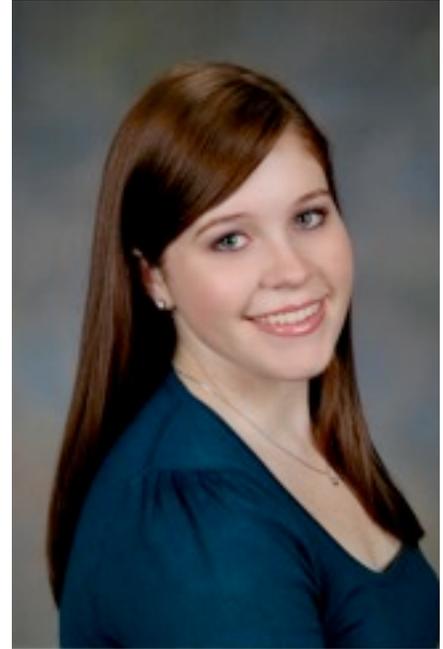
On Sunday, Lofsnes and Scott taught a master class for the Erie Dance Consortium that Erie-area dance students were able to attend. Lofsnes was also able to teach master classes Monday and Tuesday for the dance department's modern classes. Overall, though an intense and grueling process, 360° Dance Company's residency was a positive experience for all involved. *6-1* was performed at Viva la Danse May 4-6 in the Mary D'Angelo Performing Arts Center.

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

by Andrea Lankester

Some statistics state that the average college student changes their major approximately three times throughout the duration of their undergraduate experience. However, Megan Dunphy, class of 2012, is an exception. A native of Columbus, Ohio, Megan was able to find the best of both worlds throughout her time at Mercyhurst and pursue two very different paths. She began dancing at the age of three in classical ballet, but later took tap, jazz, lyrical, modern, and pointe, while also dancing in a traveling company throughout high school. She came to Mercyhurst as a dance major, which she continued for a year and a half. As she began to take a few business classes, Megan realized that this was where she wanted her career to go, but she was unwilling to let go of dance. She then switched to a finance major and a dance minor, and was able to find the perfect compromise. Megan was also unique in that she was able to stay completely involved in the department even after finishing her minor requirements by being a part of the outreach team and participating in the Liturgical Dance Ensemble, Dance Club, and Nu Delta Alpha. Soon, Megan was asked to be the chair of the outreach program, and her services to the department became irreplaceable. The outreach team is a group of students who work closely with the dance chair to create community service opportunities in the dance field, and after Megan

joined, the activities increased by one hundred percent. She began coordinating lecture-demonstrations containing student choreography and repertoire, facilitated green ribbon sales for the Jenni-Lyn Watson Scholarship fund, organized donations to the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and organized participation in Ghosts Afloat at the museum. In addition, Megan developed partnerships with North Coast Dance, the Girl Scouts, and various schools and nursing homes in Erie. Furthermore, this is only the beginning of Megan's success story, as she recently became the new finance operational risks specialist at Huntington National Bank Corporation Headquarters in Columbus. When asked about her decision to not pursue dance as a career, Megan mentioned how she is still happy to have kept dance a part of her life, as it helps to gain discipline and motivation to reach goals. Her advice to current students is to really enjoy being in school and use this opportunity to learn not only the subjects, but also about life. In her words, "You learn how to learn, which is important before you enter the real world". Megan's story is one of incredible inspiration to current and future students of the dance department, and it is clear that she is already on the road to success. Good luck Megan! We will miss you!



Student Research Grant Recipients

- Katarina Fitzpatrick (YAGP)
- Katie Boatright (Project Dance)
- Abby Savage (Project Dance)
- Courtney Naughton (YAGP)
- Elena Cvetkovich (YAGP)
- Kathryn Tokar (YAGP)
- Anna Edens (YAGP)
- Tess Sinke (Project Dance)

TRIPS TO ACDEFA AND YAGP

by: Anna Edens

Even before the start of spring term, many dancers in the department had spent previous months preparing and rehearsing to participate in Youth American Grand Prix (YAGP) and the American College Dance Festival (ACDF). Both events took place in March, and a few dancers proved their passion for dancing by sacrificing the last days of term break to travel to Penn State University for ACDF on March 2-5. Shortly after, nine others left from March 9-12 to perform and compete in Indianapolis in the semifinal round of YAGP.

For those who traveled to ACDF, it was a valuable experience. While they were there, they participated in many different master classes and they had the opportunity to view works from other choreographers involved with colleges in the surrounding region. Junior Jessica Stachelrodt went for the full experience by branching out and adjudicating a section from her Raw Edges piece, "Requiem for a New Day." With this process she not only received feedback from the judges on her choreographic techniques, but it gave the Mercyhurst Dancers another opportunity to perform among their peers. Freshman Elena Cvetkovich summarized the experience by explaining that ACDF had "an environment which embraced creativity and welcomed all who have a passion for dance."

For the dancers who attended the YAGP competition, several months of intense coaching was required in preparation for the event. Seven girls performed variations, including ones from *Raymonda*, *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*. One would have never known that they were performing before a large panel of judges, because each individual filled the stage with confidence and an exquisite presence. Maggie Doherty, a freshman in the department, performed the Spanish variation

from *Swan Lake*. She enjoyed the opportunity to perceive a different character and act "sassy and flirty." Aside from the solos, the Mercyhurst Dance



Department also performed an ensemble piece, "Multitude of Angels," choreographed by Noelle Partusch. Even though the piece involved a high demand for stamina and jumping, the dancers pushed through and were invited by the judges to participate in the finals in New York at the end of April. This marks the second year that the department has been invited to the final round to compete with the best ensembles from various places around the world.

Both of these experiences were used as teaching tools for the dancers in the department. From receiving feedback from judges to dancing among fellow artists it is a learning process that cannot be taught straight from a book. The department is very pleased with the spectacular performances displayed by all the dancers who participated in ACDF and YAGP, and hopefully the talent at Mercyhurst will continue to be displayed through these events in the coming years.

CLUBS: A YEAR IN REVIEW

by Chelsea Robicheau



Dancers preparing for the Nu Delta Alpha talent show



Jumpstart Pizza Party hosted by Dance Club

The Mercyhurst dancers are all unique and diverse, many with double majors or minors as well as extracurricular hobbies and activities. While working outside the Dance Department is encouraged, we are also lucky enough to have the opportunity to be active in the clubs and organizations that augment the department. Dancers can become members of Liturgical Dance Ensemble, Nu Delta Alpha, or Dance Club. All of these organizations are student-run with a faculty advisor, and each group is responsible for events in and outside of the Dance Department.

The Liturgical Dance Ensemble is known for outreach, performing at numerous local churches. This year the Ensemble has performed in the Christmas, Palm Sunday and Baccalaureate Mass on campus as well. President Kristin Marincic and advisor Noelle Partusch have worked together to send students to New York City in April to participate in Project Dance. The dancers had the opportunity to perform in Times Square as well as watch numerous other liturgical groups share their choreography. Within the Department, the Ensemble hosted a colored leotard day in celebration of Christmas, donating all the proceeds to SafeNet, a local domestic abuse prevention and

treatment organization. The Liturgical Dance Ensemble celebrated National Dance Week by organizing a Labyrinth in the danceSpace, which allowed the entire Mercyhurst community to come in and explore movement while moving through a maze.

Nu Delta Alpha has been equally busy during the 2011-2012 school year. NDA organized "Pink Day," which allowed the dancers to wear pink leotards and also raised close to \$100 for the National Breast Cancer Foundation. NDA organized and hosted the cast party after the Holiday Concert. NDA is also active outside of the department, hosting numerous bake sales in order to raise money to send one of the society's members to upcoming national conference. NDA raised money for the American Heart Association in the Mercyhurst community by selling carnations for Valentine's Day. The society also raised almost \$700 for a Mercyhurst senior fighting leukemia by being an integral part of the winter term on-campus Talent Show.

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Dance Club has had an incredible annual impact within the department, the Mercyhurst community, and beyond. Its members were responsible for organizing the activities during the Dance Department Jumpstart week, pumping returners up for the coming year and helping new freshmen to assimilate into the college atmosphere. Dance Club was responsible for lots of holiday spirit during Halloween and Christmas, organizing colored leotard days as well as a Secret Santa gift exchange. The Dance Club has worked to raise money for Dancers Responding to AIDS and, in conjunction with the Mercyhurst Student Government, raised over \$100 for the charity. One of the club's most notable achievements is in raising over \$600 for the Jenni-Lyn Watson Scholarship through the Charity Calendar. Not only did the calendar allow dancers to exhibit their strength, beauty, and prowess, but it also gave student photographer T. Stauffer the opportunity to demonstrate the skill found in other areas of the Mercyhurst art community.

Each organization provides rich opportunities for dancers, working to establish themselves as separate entities, but also collaborating to engage the Dance Department and



Mercyhurst community in fun and wholesome activities.

ALUMNI UPDATE!

Michelle Conroy, class of 2010, has some exciting new changes coming up within the year. Starting on July 1st, she will be the Regional Director of Northern Virginia's Little People's Creative Workshop. This well-established mobile dance studio travels throughout all of Northern Virginia and goes into preschools to teach dance. Michelle's duties will include overseeing the region and teaching some of the classes while also supervising and hiring

teachers for the upcoming school year.

In addition, Michelle has decided to continue dancing with Gin Dance Company, a contemporary ballet company which she joined last fall. Gin Dance is located in Virginia as well, and was founded in 1994 by director Shu-Chen after her immigration to the United States. The company performs a wide range of repertoire under the

belief that anything and everything is possible.

Although the coming year will bring a lot of new experiences and responsibilities for Michelle, her dedication and hard work is definitely paying off. We hope to see her around the DanceSpace sometime soon for a visit to hear all about her new job!

NEPALI DANCE DAY

by Rachel Cockerham



Photo credit: Jessica Stachelrodt.

On April 14, 2012, Tess Sinke, a junior dance major, organized a Dance Day for Nepali refugee children in the danceSpace at Mercyhurst. It was altogether an incredible experience. Each of the dancers who volunteered was given a "buddy" to spend the day with. A little girl named Basanta was my buddy. The day started with a game of Giant Human Knot as an ice breaker and then we sat down to get to know our buddies. I asked the questions we were suggested to ask about each other and she would answer with a word or two and then lapse back into silence. I kept trying to think of new questions to ask (and rephrasing them when she didn't understand) and, finally, when I couldn't think of anything else, I asked her about her favorite food. She replied with simply: "Nepali." I told her that I liked Italian food, but that my home church in Maryland is good friends with a pastor from India and that his

wife made a meal for some of the members of my church one Sunday after the service. I then bashfully explained that I didn't like it because it was very spicy. As soon as I said "India", her face lit up and soon as I finished speaking she told me about how her parents were from India. She then excitedly continued with excerpts from her parents' life story. It was incredible to watch that one word open her up to speaking so much more comfortably to me. After our conversation, we sat and watched beautiful performances of ballet variations by Katarina Fitzpatrick, Maggie Doherty, Elena Cvetkovich, and Kathryn Tokar, all freshmen in the Dance Department. The little girls were fascinated by the tutus and pointe shoes. They were then asked to get up and show us some Nepali dances. Basanta was reluctant at first, but she finally joined her friends. Music was put on and she immediately came back to me. "Excuse me," she said. "This is not Nepali music. This is not music to dance." It was difficult to keep myself from laughing at this statement. Her personality was incredibly similar to mine and I completely understood her confusion. In my opinion, if you're going to dance, you need to have the right music. I finally convinced her to show us some steps anyway,

and all of the girls were incredibly talented. They knew dances with intricate hand motions, and they even taught us some group dances. Jessica Stachelrodt, a junior dance major, was able to capture Basanta and I in the middle of a spin. Jessica then taught everyone some basic hip hop. The girls picked up the movement extremely quickly. To end the event, everyone enjoyed dancing around the room together. Some of the girls knew very little English and verbal communication was often very difficult, but we all shared an understanding and love for the language of dance. It altogether a wonderful cultural exchange and fun was definitely had by all who attended.

GUESTALUMS

by: Mary Kersey



For Mercyhurst’s spring performance, *Viva la Danse*, the University brought in a few of their alumni: Pamela Swaney, Lauren Stenroos and Justin Hogan. Pamela Swaney is currently a principal dancer with the Saint Louis Ballet, and performed the *Dying Swan* variation as well as a duet with Justin titled *Coming to Terms*. Although both were incredible, *Dying Swan* was definitely a personal favorite. The piece is not only technically challenging, but also must portray the struggle the swan goes through in fighting to live while knowing her end is coming soon. Swaney’s artistry was perfect for this piece; she truly captured the story through her movements. One audience member even turned to me and said “The way her hand dropped at the end of the piece was stunning.” It is amazing that one simple gesture can be so beautiful and convey so much emotion.

Lauren Stenroos currently dances for Dayton Ballet and performed the pas de deux *Diana*

and *Acteon*, with another guest artist and member of the Dayton Ballet, Justin Koertgen. Stenroos was able to emote behind the strict confines of the classical piece and make it wonderful to watch, while also being complimented by the strength and excitement of Koertgen. The sharp motions emphasized the contrast to the slow sections of the piece, and all in all the two worked well together to create a vivacious pas de deux.

Justin Hogan is another alumna who is currently dancing with the St. Louis Ballet and performed the lead male role in *Paquita*. He had a wonderful quality when he danced that made him appear to float, and he sailed through the air in his solo variation in a way that made the audience gasp. Not only was he exciting to watch on his own, but he was also a great partner to Ashley Cook, a Mercyhurst junior who was performing the lead female role. The presence of Mercyhurst Alumni in *Viva la Danse* not only added to the show, but acted as an inspiration to current students. Both faculty and students alike were definitely inspired this weekend by the professionalism and grace that seemed to radiate out from these former students.

**Jane L. Barr
Scholarship Recipients**

- Emily McAveney
- Eileen McDonnell
- Elisabeth Wilson

Faculty Awards

**Nu Delta Alpha
Academic Excellence
Award:**

Melissa Sheffield

**Palmer Service
Award:**

Kristen Marincic

Spotlight Award:

Amy Deer

**Étoile Leadership
Award:**

Kelly Clymer

New Award for Next Year

**Jenni-Lyn “Spirit of
Dance” Award**

The Magic Circle

Your tax-deductible contribution is recognized in performance programs and supports scholarships for study abroad, guest artists, master classes and residencies for dance majors

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You may also contribute to the **Jenni-Lyn Watson Memorial Fund** by visiting
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