

PAS DE DEUX:

Performance Art and Academia Forge an Innovative Partnership

By Erin Ryan

American poet William Stafford observed that children dance before they learn there is anything that isn't music. There are those who refuse that lesson, who make movement their first language and hear music even in the absence of sound. They show us what the human body can do when nothing is wasted and the power of physical control blurs into emotional surrender. They are dancers.

Boise is home to Idaho Dance Theatre (IDT) and Trey McIntyre Project (TMP), two professional dance companies that are working with Boise State to advance the art form and its educational and cultural offshoots. Through a new agreement, the university is offering customized courses from the core curriculum that combine classroom and distance learning to accommodate dancers' unconventional schedules. In return, the companies are providing the Boise State community better access to more performances and recognition as a vital partner. As the dynamic develops, it may grow to include the Treasure Valley arts community as a whole.

PRACTICAL PASSION

"From choreography to music, scenery to storylines, it has always been a hallmark of IDT to take advantage of the talent and expertise on campus as well as share the company's unique resources," says Marla Hansen, co-founder of IDT and head of the dance discipline in Boise State's Department of Theatre Arts.

IDT alumnus Justin Allen took advantage of the company's long-standing academic agreement with Boise State before he graduated with a degree in philosophy in 1997. Now a successful writer and performer in New York City, he says splitting his passions as an undergraduate was invaluable.

"In order to follow this unusual I needed to be able to study dance simultaneously," he says, adding methods he learned as a dancer work as a novelist and ballet

career path, and writing that the storytelling continue to inform his script writer.

The recent agreement offers even more opportunities for performers to pursue their academic goals, which helped IDT dancer and elementary education major Caitlin Stanley.

"I am equally passionate about my education and my dancing career," she says. "I will push my body as far as I can, but I will always have my degree to back me up."



JOHN KELLY

While performance is a consuming passion, IDT dancer Caitlin Stanley (above left) and TMP dancer Ashley Werhun (below) also are dedicated to pursuing higher education.

BODY AND MIND

In its first full performance season in 2008, TMP toured more than 25 cities across the globe. The ensuing acclaim is built on absolute discipline, demanding nearly every ounce of passion the dancers possess.

"These are incredibly skilled, talented people working at a physical level far above the human average, but cognitive thought uses a different part of the brain," says TMP executive director and dancer John Michael Schert. "We learn every day as dancers, and the agreement with Boise State is another way for us to open our minds, to evolve. In turn, we want to make the university community part of what we do."

Five TMP dancers are taking a tailor-made English class this spring, including Ashley Werhun. No stranger to the balancing act, Werhun attended a traditional high school in Edmonton, Alberta, and trained with the National Ballet of Canada and Juilliard during the summers. TMP is her first full-time job as a professional, and even with the added rigors of being a college student, she says the rewards are equally substantial.

"Having this relationship with Boise State is such a gift. It's an absolute wonder. Every dancer friend of mine is jealous," Werhun says. "I love getting out of my work mind and concentrating on school, having that balance. It has made my experience of Boise much richer."

For more about Idaho Dance Theatre, visit <http://idahodance theatre.org/>.

For more about Trey McIntyre Project, visit <http://www.treymcintyre.com/>

