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# Dancer

## MAGAZINE

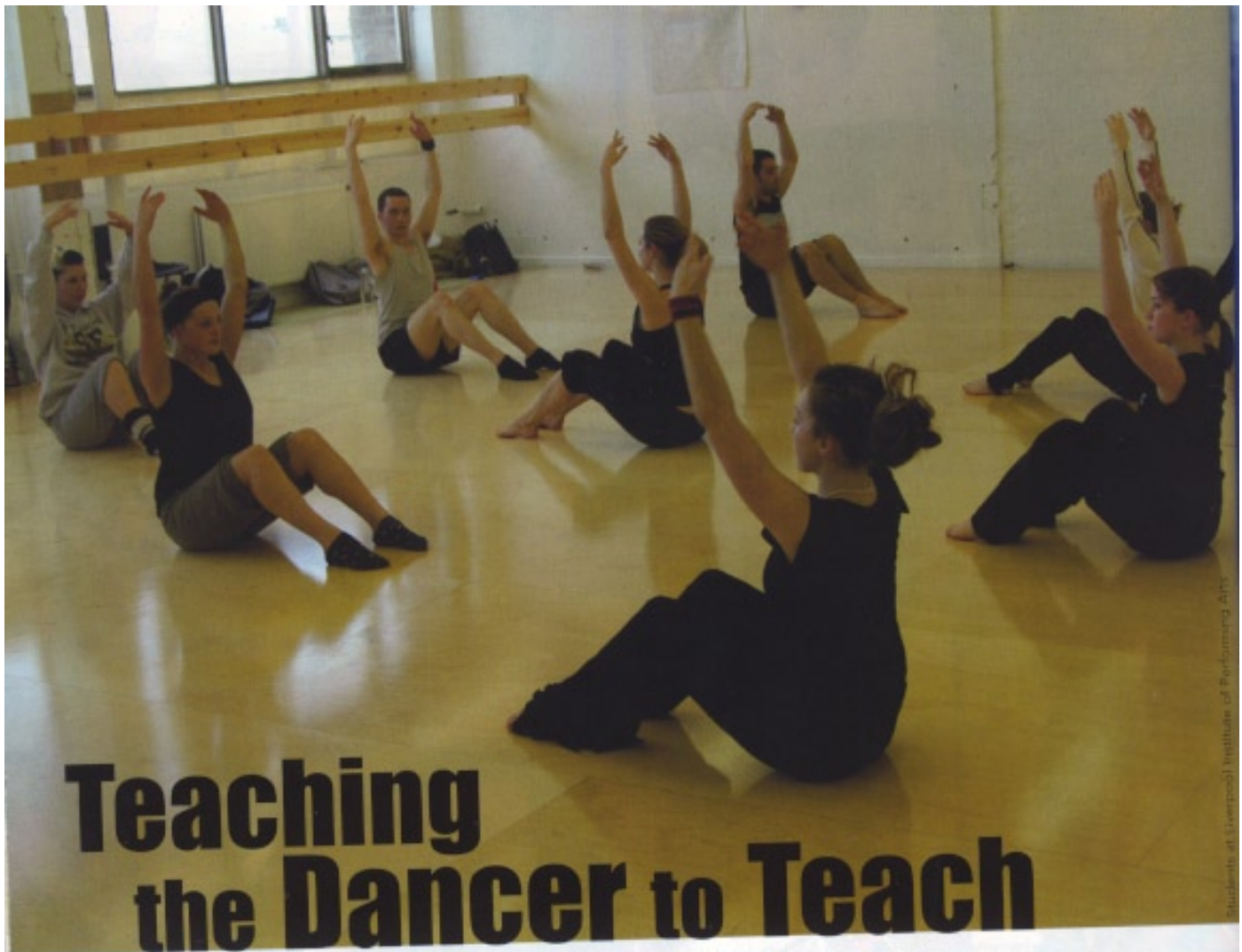


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HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO

“Counterpart” Photo: Scott Rosenberg

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# Teaching the Dancer to Teach

by Lisa M. Browder

Louis Kavouras, Chairperson of the Department of Dance at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), has an impressive list of credentials, both as a performer and as a teacher. His professionalism is daunting, his passion is heartfelt and his views are astute on whether you can teach a dancer to teach.

Kavouras has an MFA in Dance and a BA in Theater and Dance. He has performed professionally with the Erick Hawkins Dance Company and is accomplished as a choreographer, designer and visual and graphic artist. He has taught from Nevada to Ohio, North Carolina, Texas, Hawaii, Denmark, Russia, England, Nova Scotia and Jamaica.

He says, "One of the things I learned early when I first started teaching was that you can provide materials, you can tell someone everything you know, you can guide them, but only they really put it together...When I see the cartoon where the light bulbs go off, that's usually a solitary act where they go, 'Oh yeah. I get it!' and they've assimilated all the knowledge and they've put it together. I think only egotistical teachers think they're the ones who've done this for a student. I think the only person that pays for the electricity for that light bulb is you...You can teach everyone how to teach but there's only going to be certain people where it really clicks, where that light bulb goes on."

"People are always asking me, 'What makes a good dancer' and I sometimes say, 'A real dancer, a real artist in dance, is someone who goes out and looks at the traffic and sees movement.' They



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Students at Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts



Students in Yorubaland, Ife

see the world through movement and I think a good teacher is like that too. They see how something is put together and they know how to break that down and communicate that to someone."

"I think you can teach a dancer what teaching is...you can teach them how to put a class together...you can teach them what materials should be in the class - that a class should have a warm up, that if it's modern, you should work on contractions...I think all of those things are intellectual concepts that we can teach."

But learning the material does not guarantee a good teacher. "The real art of teaching...is as special as the art of creation." It still requires an ability to communicate ideas, movement and passion to someone else. "If we took one hundred students who are trained to teach, I think of those - maybe fifteen would be good teachers - fifteen or twenty. I think of the master teachers, three to six...What I think of as the people who are master teachers - they are able to communicate the world to their students. They are able to open the world up...Teachers are inspirational."

They are also well versed in muscle structure and its limitations and have studied as many possible courses related to dance as they can. With this in mind, UNLV offers an impressive array of studies in stage movement, improvisation, composition, choreography, music theory, accompaniment for dance, production, history and criticism, post-modern concepts, educational methods, children's



Students in Yerevan, Russia

dance, labanotation, theory and philosophy, nutrition, injury prevention and of course, technique classes. Students are allowed to train with equal emphasis in ballet, modern and jazz and other areas of dance including ethnic, tap, ballroom and musical theatre.

"I always feel there's a difference between technique and choreography – that a technique class should really prepare the student and prepare the body to deal with all the harsh aspects that choreography puts on top of them. I feel that choreography should really be normative, and that's a word we use in Hawkins... Techniques should be using the body the way the body is designed to work – where form follows function. Now I think that sometimes in choreography, we end up, because of the passion, because of the expression and what needs to be expressed, we may choreograph something that isn't quite normative... Where I see a problem is

where the technique class ends up giving the student these non-normative things to do, these things that actually pull the body away from its center, that actually use the body in a manner that it shouldn't be designed to do."

Good teachers understand these limitations and know how to work with them effectively. Ultimately, Kavouras believes that teaching dancers to teach is important in the overall scheme of things. "It's important that we try. It's important that we teach people to teach. Whether we end up making brilliant teachers or not... I don't know that we can determine that. I think that we need to do the best job we can to train teachers who, maybe, can become incredible teachers. It's our responsibility to nurture and develop it." •