The Art of TEACHING the Arts

Program 8: Nurturing Independent Thinkers

Dance

Segment 2 Background Information

Michael O'Banion

20 years teaching

About the School

Denver School of the Arts
Denver, CO

Type:
Urban/Arts-focused

Grades:
6-12

Students:
900
Very mixed socio-economic status

Majors:
Creative Writing, Dance, Theatre, Instrumental Music, Stagecraft & Design, Video & Cinema Arts, Visual Arts, and Vocal Music

About the Program

Faculty:
2 full-time + resident and guest artists

Students:
115

Facilities:
Above Average in the Area
- 3 large dance studios
- 2 theaters (178 seats, 550 seats)
- Full light grid
- Dressing rooms

Required Courses:
Modern, Ballet, Jazz, African & Spanish, Improvisation, Composition, Repertory, Performance Technique, Partnering, and Senior Seminar

Elective Courses:
Tap, Hip Hop, and Pointe

Audition:
Technique Master Class, individual choreography showing, and interview

About the Featured Class

Senior Solo:

Students choreograph other advanced students as well as their own solos, and then the graduating class works as a team to create a full evening of dance in concert form as a culminating choreographic project.

Preparations/Prerequisites:
Eligible students are seniors with a B or better grade

Student Motivation:
High

Music Guidelines:
For the senior choreography project, students are not generally allowed to choose music with lyrics. However, if students can justify their choices then they are usually accepted. In Monique's case, her solo was a theatrical representation about a woman left alone and fearful. The music/lyrics reinforced the subject matter and her movement choices showed integrity and risk-taking in a thematic and dramatic context.

In the Teacher's Words

What is the significance of contractions in the dance vocabulary?

The term "contraction and release" in its inception was a fundamental of the Martha Graham technique. It has since become a universal term for the engaging of the abdominal muscles (center) as a dramatic physical movement. The contraction can be a motivating force for a dancer's change in movement. It also holds a metaphoric meaning in modern dance, where to contract is to pull energy inward, and to release is to send the energy outward. These two impulses are akin to recoiling from the world and re-entering the world.