

The Art of **TEACHING** the Arts

Program 7: Making the Most of Community Resources **Dance**

SEGMENT 1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Michael O'Banion
20 years teaching

Hannah Kahn
Guest Choreographer

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 Art, and
Vocal Music

About the Dance Program

Faculty:
2 full-time + resident and guest artists

Students:
115

Facilities:
Above Average in the Area
• 3 large dance studios
• 2 theatres (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 showings, and interview

About the Featured Class

Repertory Class:

Advanced dance students learn from professional choreographers who select work from their professional repertory (works previously created and periodically performed) and teach or “set” the repertory on these advanced students. This course is the highest level of repertory offered.

Preparations/Prerequisites:
Intermediate Dance Class or equivalent

Student Motivation:
High

Student Level:
Advanced

Paying for Guest Artists:

Funding for guest choreographers comes from several sources: a non-profit organization called Friends of the Denver School of the Arts; fundraising by parents; and in-kind donations and trades with the guest artists. For example, the school creates costumes for student use that Hannah Kahn's company then borrows; in exchange she gives the school free time and use of her repertory. With another choreographer, the school trades performance space for the choreographer's time. Michael finds that these exchanges strengthen the bond between the school and the guest artists.

In the Teacher's Words

What are your criteria for selecting guest artists?

Michael O'Banion: We make sure that the guest artists are capable of working within the structure of a school. But first and foremost they have to like kids. They need to understand that students are emotionally volatile. Some students are always ready to go, others need more coaching, more time. Since guest artists are coming from the professional idiom, I like to make sure that they can translate their work and their personality to the level of working with kids.

In addition, we want artistic integrity and choreographers who have merit. I want to make sure that there's an artistic resonance in their work. I want to make sure that they are teaching the students the artistic aspect of being a choreographer, not just stringing choreography together and then drilling it.