December 2012

Dear Alumni and Friends,

As I write this, I am still getting my “sea legs” after returning to the chair’s office in July 2012. Nina Nelson will return to teaching after a semester’s sabbatical spent revamping the music courses in the dance curriculum. Under her remarkable and visionary leadership, the department has risen to new heights of visibility and excellence, producing graduates who have the skills necessary to adapt and prosper in the diverse world of dance today. Just read in this newsletter about what our alumni, current students, and faculty are doing to get a taste of how WMU is impacting dance around the globe!

Before fall semester even began, Chicago choreographer Monique Haley created a new work for Western Dance Project, our 13-member touring ensemble. Talk to Me! has already been performed at Michigan Dance Day, the Oakland Dance Festival and Dance Chicago and will be included on the program of the Winter Gala Dance Concert which opens January 31, 2013 in Shaw Theatre. Kirsten Harvey’s Slit Red was also selected for Dance Chicago. There were a number of other exciting residencies throughout the fall, including:

- KT Nelson, of San Francisco’s renowned ODC (Oberlin Dance Collective), who was commissioned to create a new Great Work which will premiere on the Winter Gala Concert. KT also taught choreography classes and met with seniors. She will return in January for final rehearsals for Light and Landless and to speak at the annual Great Works Dinner.
- Julie Nakagawa, artistic director of DanceWorks Chicago, who taught ballet master classes and conducted an open rehearsal with her company. Students who had the opportunity to perform Nelly von Bommel’s Addio Amore with DanceWorks Chicago at the Harris Theatre last January were especially delighted to renew their friendships and take class alongside company members.
- Willy Shives, former principal dancer with the Joffrey Ballet, who returned to WMU to stage Gerald Arpino’s gorgeous 4-movement ballet, Viva Vivaldi! for the Winter Gala Concert. Willy will return in January to teach master classes and put the finishing touches on this Great Work.
- Los Angeles choreographer, Lauren Thompson Hall, and alumnus and globe-trotting teacher and choreographer Derrick Alfonso Evans, who each created new works for our students for the concert as well as teaching master classes and providing career advice for the seniors.

Also packed in to a busy fall, were a very successful and artistically satisfying Orchesis Concert, a residency with Wren LaFeet, and the fifth year of our scholarship fundraiser, Dancing with the WMU/Kazoo Stars. Stephanie Hinman, Director of Sustainability for the Hinman Company, and senior Jesse Hoisington won this year’s event which raised nearly $10,000 for scholarships for our very talented students. We finished the semester with a performance by Western Dance Project and friends at Art Hop, and our first ever Fall Showcase featuring the final dances by the advanced choreography students and Derrick Evans’ commissioned dance for 25 of our newest students. We hope you will join us for our Winter Gala Concert of Dance, January 31, February 1 & 2, to see for yourself just how talented our students are! Tickets are now on sale at the Gilmore Ticket Office by calling 269-387-6222.

My very best wishes to you for a holiday season filled with dance and time with those you love,

Jane
Lisa LaMarre (BA 2005)

Lisa LaMarre is creating and teaching in the greater Detroit area. After touring this past summer with the Great Lakes Ensemble (www.greatlakesensemble.org) and participating in contact improv sets with James Cornish, Dan Godston, and other innovative jazz musicians, it was time to begin working on new choreography back home in Detroit. Lisa co-produced a work “Drifting Sculptures in a Fluid Harmonic” which was performed live at Belle Isle, in the Detroit River, as a part of Access Arts Detroit and later developed into a film by Joel Silvers. This fall her Detroit-based dance company, LaMarre and Dancers (www.lamarreanddancers.webs.com) premiered two new works. “The Vicarious Trail” was premiered at the Detroit Institute of Art, and “5” was premiered at Vitosha Haus in Ann Arbor. Currently, Lisa teaches at Wayne State University where she has choreographed her latest work based on the art brut of Judith Scott, titled "for judy."

Erin Lamont (BA 2002)

Erin Lamont’s burlesque group The Lalas (@lalasburlesque), have been performing at celebrity parties and events, in addition to The Palms in Las Vegas. She also booked a choreographer/dancer role in October on “Tosh.0” and is a substitute dance instructor at the EDGE. She continues to audition and love life on the beach with her six month old child and husband.

Christina Maley (BA 2004)

Christina Maley is currently living in Houston, TX taking classes and enjoying the many great dance concerts in the community. She has been working with the stagehand and wardrobe unions since she moved to Houston. In the coming months, she will be working as an electrician for the Houston Symphony and wardrobe supervisor for the Houston Ballet. Christina and Michael bought a 1925 bungalow this past year and have been enjoying small home improvement projects since then.
Caitlin Perna (BA 2010)

After graduation in 2010, Caitlin Perna moved immediately to the Bay Area of San Francisco. In the past two and a half years, she has performed with small companies for showcases, evening works, dance films and fundraiser events. She is currently dancing in fellow WMU Alumna Jessie Cosentino’s company Cardinalidae. It is a site-specific company where they plan to take the audience on adventures to experience dance in new ways. This past summer Caitlin experienced 4 months of bliss traveling through Europe and Morocco. She performed in a small improvisation show in Italy with two musicians, a guitarist and a violinist. They experimented with tempo and a game of switching between who leads - dancer or musician. Recently she worked with Man Dance Company for their NutcrackOr. It’s a showcase of a new and improved Nutcracker set in San Francisco, with Harvey Milk’s photos coming to life, a drag queen, Vegas style tutus, and a grown up Clara and Fritz on a journey of sexual orientation. Caitlin is looking forward to her next few years in San Francisco!

Marissa Staniec (BFA 2008)

Marissa is starting her second year in New York city and is still loving it. She recently earned her Zumba certification and has started teaching classes in the New York area. Marissa continues to take dance classes around the city and has begun studying voice to focus more on a musical theater career. She recently concluded her contract with Spirit/Dublin Productions and continues to live with WMU alumna Jackie Nowicki in Astoria.

Angela Yetzke (BA 1994)

Angela finished her MFA this year at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and has completed 25% of her Laban Movement Analysis certification (CMA) in New York City. She is on the dance faculty at Hope College in Holland, Michigan and is the mother of two boys, eleven and eight years old.
Jacquelyn Nowicki (BFA 2008)

Jackie has had a busy and exciting year of dancing, teaching, and choreographing. Currently in her fourth year of living in NYC, she has had the opportunity to work with so many amazing companies and choreographers including Brice Mousset, Derek Mitchell, KDNY, Elizabeth Jones, and DAMAGEDANCE among others. Jackie finished a West Coast tour with a “nourishing through movement” contemporary company in 2010, and also had the opportunity to perform at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland in the summer of 2011. She most recently was awarded a full scholarship to Pilobolus's Summer Intensive and has since been working with the company on an intermittent basis. As a teacher and choreographer, Jackie has been teaching master classes at conventions throughout the United States as well as at Steps on Broadway and Broadway Dance Center in NYC. She was selected as Dianne McIntyre's assistant for the re-staging of How Long Brethren? at the University of Minnesota. In the fall, she was commissioned by WMU's Department of Dance to create a contemporary piece for the current WDP company members, and taught a few master classes for the department. Jackie is also judging dance competitions for numerous companies in the U.S. and Canada and hopes to continue to spread her passion for dance with every opportunity that comes her way!

Ryan Schmidt (BFA 2007)

Ryan is performing as an aerialist and dancer in New York City. She enjoyed being on tour this past year as an aerialist with “Life In Color,” an electronic dance music concert with DJs and entertainment. Website: www.ryan-schmidt.com

Rebecca Culp (BA 2004)

Rebecca Yourison Culp is a member of the Saint Paul City Ballet Company and happy to finally have a paid artist contract and shoe allowance! She is enjoying teaching Vaganova technique classes at the Saint Paul City Ballet School. In May, Rebecca originated the role of “John” in a new Peter Pan ballet, and enjoyed flying throughout the ballet while working with Flying by Foy. Her husband, Nicholas, graduated this fall with a Psy. D. in Clinical Psychology. Twenty-two month old Elliana is running and talking and loves anything that bounces, including jumping dancers!
This past May, eight of our WMU dance majors were afforded the opportunity to perform at the American College Dance Festival Association’s National Conference at the Kennedy Center in the heart of Washington, D.C. Dancers Genna Carey, Alex Hlavaty, Jesse Hoisington, Katie Mattar, Kaitlyn Pollock, Marley Schmidt, Taji Stallworth, and Brittny Tesner were chosen to perform Foreground through ACDFA’s East-Central regional conference held in February of 2012 at Grand Valley State University. Only three pieces from the regional conference were given this amazing opportunity.

The dancers had a very eventful four days in the nation’s capital. They began with taking several ballet, jazz, and modern classes from professors of universities from around the country. Rehearsal director Carolyn Pavlik also rehearsed Foreground with the students in George Washington University’s rehearsal space before their scheduled performance date. Not only did the dancers and faculty spend their time in theaters, they also toured the city to see all of the landmarks and monuments unique to our country’s history.

On the third and final day of the conference, Foreground was performed at the matinee and evening shows. The result was a huge success. The dancers had a wonderful experience performing, and they had the chance to see the talent of all the other students from many different states.

Foreground was choreographed by Lauren Edson, then a dancer with the Trey McIntyre Project in Boise, Idaho. Edson won Western Michigan University’s first Great Works Dance Project National Choreography Competition, and was in residence at WMU in September 2011 to set her piece on the students. WMU will name the winner of the second National Choreography Competition in March 2013. A public viewing of the top three candidates will be held at WMU’s Little Theatre on Tuesday, March 26 from 5-7pm. Please plan to join us to help choose the next winner!
WMU Dance in China—Times Two!

In May 2012, the Global Initiatives Grant funded Professor Sharon Garber and Associate Professor David Curwen, and 8 WMU dance students to travel to Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) in Taipei, Taiwan, Sichuan University in Chengdu, China and Beijing, China. Juniors making the trip were Stacey Cable, Kaitlyn DeSatterlee, Colleen Griffin, Joseph Hernandez, Sayre Masters, Dani Mattar, Hanna Stangebye, and Alastair Watt. Activities included:

- Classes, both taken and observed, in a variety of traditional Chinese dance and movement techniques, such as classical Chinese dance, Kung Fu, Tai Chi Do In, and Chinese folk dance
- Contact with student mentors, translators, and guides
- Joint performances in China with Sichuan University and Jinjiang University dance students
- WMU student guest teaching of hip-hop technique, a dance idiom not taught in China
- Presentations and guest teaching by WMU faculty
- Trips to observe professional dance companies in Taiwan: Cloud Gate and Dance Forum Taipei
- Social events with faculty and students in Taiwan and China
- Cultural excursion trips in Taipei, Chengdu, and Beijing

The goal for learning in this project was two-fold. The first goal was to challenge the students to rise physically and artistically to the rigors of different programs. These experiences included master classes and performances, as well as conducting themselves at all times as ambassadors of the department and the university. The second goal was to affect the students’ senior capstone projects, which will include performance, creativity and theory. It was also meant to influence their global perspectives for career goals as they head toward graduation. An ancillary benefit of choosing juniors is that there is now the opportunity for these students to share their learned experiences with the rest of the student body during their senior year.

The students were exposed to the global nature of the professional dance world through their experiences of watching professional rehearsals in Taiwan at both Cloud Gate and Dance Forum Taipei. They were also able to feel firsthand the rigors of the training at TNUA as a pre-professional program and consider, perhaps for the first time, a semester of study abroad. They were reminded of the necessity for training in a diversity of styles and the need for dancers to pick up and/or master all forms of dance. They were given three performance opportunities that allowed them to recognize the difficulties and pressures of performing in new, unfamiliar settings. In a larger sense, they were able to recognize and embrace different cultural traditions, learning along the way that language and cultural barriers can often lead to misunderstandings.

Having a group of eight strong, capable, talented WMU students with us demonstrated the strength of our program. While our department specializes in different dance genres than those of Taipei and Chengdu, our students demonstrated great passion, along with a willingness and fearlessness to tackle new ideas and movements. During the course of the trip, they took classes, taught classes, and performed at a high level while representing WMU and the Dance Department in a very positive light.

One of the most powerful learning experiences, hopefully shared by both eastern and western students, came directly from the interactions that took place in and out of the studio. While language was always an issue, dance provided a common language that allowed for a more universal connection between the students. Although long-held political differences and mistrust between our two countries exist, as played out on the world stage, the current youth in China were completely fascinated with American culture and our students. They were treated like movie stars, and were often photographed. In this case, being ‘different’ was a very positive experience.

The assessments of this trip in the areas of student outcomes, faculty professional development and program impact were so strong that a second Global Initiatives Grant has been awarded to Professors Garber and Curwen. They will take another group of eight WMU dance students back to Taipei and Chengdu in May 2013, with cultural excursions to either Beijing or Hong Kong. Expanded teaching and creative research opportunities in Taipei, Kaoshiung, Chengdu and Jinjiang are part of this proposal. Similar to the previous trip, the goals continue to focus on experiences that are learner-centered, discovery driven and globally engaged. This proposal for 2013 also includes a focus on student choreography that utilizes technology in the prepared concert programming. Students who will represent WMU on the trip this May include current juniors Lucas Beachler, Jalisa Brown, Connor Cornelius, Tessa Cornwall, Julie-Ann Gambino, Julia Krueger, Alex Laya, and Brittny Tesner.
~ CHINA ~
Megan Slayter and her research partner, Jessica Lindberg Coxe, were invited last May to the Maryhill Museum of Art in Goldendale, WA as part of a weekend of activities to dedicate the opening of a new wing of the museum. The celebration included a performance of Megan and Jessica’s recent reconstruction of Loïe Fuller’s “La Mer” by a local dance group; Megan and Jessica also gave a presentation on the life and work of Fuller, as she had been one of the original founders of the museum.

Through funding provided by the College of Fine Arts and the Dept. of Dance, dance students Ashley Deran (BFA 2012), Katie McGrath (BA 2012), and current junior Noelle Price accompanied Megan and Jessica to participate in the weekend’s festivities. The WMU dancers assisted in setting “La Mer” on the young dancers of the Columbia Gorge Dance Academy with Noelle Price performing the solo role. “La Mer,” originally performed in Seattle, WA in 1925 on the lawn of the Maryhill museum, was reconstructed in the same space, with the Colombia River George in the background. History came to life as the dancers manipulated the 2000 sq. ft of silk to the enchanting music of Claude Debussy. In between the weekend’s events WMU dancers were able to take in the sights of the Pacific Northwest, help Jessica and Megan with then 3-month old Katherine and 9-month-old Annalise, and learn more about the history and influence of one of the first modern dance choreographers.
Professor Nina Nelson was on sabbatical leave during the Fall 2012 semester. She will return to the teaching faculty in January 2013 with teaching responsibilities in dance theory subjects. During the Fall semester, Nina has been doing research in preparation for teaching the music-for-dancers, choreography, and dance management courses, with her primary research focusing on music-for-dancers pedagogy. In November, Nina was a guest master teacher in the Department of Dance and Theatre at the University of North Texas. There she presented her research on vocal timbre and movement expression. There she also spent two days brainstorming with former WMU faculty member Claudia Howard Queen about optimal curriculum models for music for dance. In the music-for-dancers courses Nina hopes to combine studio work with music theory, music history, choreographic analysis and musical/movement analysis in order to prepare WMU dance students to understand the important relationship between music and dance, and to use that knowledge in their teaching and creative projects.

During the fall semester Nina also served as an accreditation site visitor at the University of South Carolina at Columbia and began a research project about dance administrative structures. She contributed to the department’s strategic planning process and continued to assist with the department’s leadership transition. Nina truly enjoyed having the time for intellectual pursuits. “I am refreshed and eagerly look forward to working with the dance students.”
The Gaga Experience

By Whitney Moncrief

To have the opportunity to indulge in self-exploration amidst the sounds of an ancient language and the electronic pulse of Radiohead was one that I will keep forever. This is only one of many significant experiences I had over the two weeks I spent in Tel Aviv, Israel, learning the basics of a new movement language called Gaga, created by Ohad Naharin, Artistic Director of Batsheva Dance Ensemble.

Our daily schedule consisted of about six hours of Gaga class, repertoire, and Gaga methodics at the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Neve Tzedeck, Israel. The mornings began with a movement improvisation session as the instructor gave ritualistic directives that created a physical imagery and spun me into a mesmerizing state.

“Float”
“Connect to your passion for moving”
“Imagine yourself as a noodle in boiling water”
“Find the humor in your movement”

Somehow, these given orders worked in combination with each other to inform and influence creative movement and thought, just as the simplicity of Gaga movement language can inform and influence the technically trained artist to be available to the possibilities from which new experiences can come.

Like language becomes a part of our daily lives, Gaga becomes a part of the lives of those who learn it. What is most exciting is that the language is new and evolving, and is fed by those who investigate it. As I have now integrated Gaga into my own teaching approach, I can see an instant connection the students have to the methods.

The dance community that I had the privilege to immerse myself in was very rich and diverse. Artists from all over the world who were eager to inform their passion for movement and creativity surrounded me, and I was fortunate to make lasting connections with them.

You won’t see Gaga in a music video or on a competitive reality show, but somehow this exploratory movement language has caught the attention of the world. I was fortunate to have experienced Gaga in its infancy and in its cultural origin. I look forward to reconnecting with Gaga as it matures, and sharing this language with my students.
Jane Baas presented in October at the International Association for Dance Medicine & Science in Singapore. WMU had the largest number of attendees with seven.

WMU Student and Faculty to Present at SDHS Conference

Senior Ronald Altman had his paper, "Familial Angles: Shapes in Le Sacre du Printemps Influence Les Biches," accepted for inclusion in the “Sacre Celebration: Revisiting, Reflecting, Revisioning” conference. This Society of Dance History Scholars Special Topics conference will take place at York University, Toronto from April 18 to 20, 2013. Congratulations to Ron for being the first WMU dance major to have scholarly work accepted by this prestigious international organization. Ron will join Associate Professor David Curwen who will also present "Jinsha, A Recipe for Interdisciplinary Work Within the University" at the same conference.

Office Coordinator Stacey Tyler Wins Award

Earlier this month, Dance Office Coordinator Stacey Tyler was one of 11 WMU staff members from across the University to be selected for the prestigious Make a Difference award. This award is a campus-wide peer-to-peer program that recognizes University staff members for their outstanding accomplishments and daily investment of energy and creativity.

Every fall and spring, semiannual awards are presented to a maximum of 15 people. Those selected for the award receive a before-tax prize of $300 and a certificate. These semiannual award winners are then eligible for one of four annual Make a Difference awards that includes a before-tax prize of $1200 prize.

Stacey was nominated for going the extra mile in so many ways, and especially for the care, support and mentoring she provides to our student office help who are pictured with Stacey in the photo (Marji Pickin, Alena Kharlamenko, Jamie Martin, Jalisa Brown, Dani Mattar, Alex Hlavaty, LaVontell Morgan). Award winners are selected by a committee of peers from the participating employee groups of AFSCME, APA, MSEA, POA, and PSSO.