



CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS

A concise and informative newsletter offering news, tips, and highlights from the ballet community.

Mission Statement



We are a professional association for classical ballet teachers, dedicated to enhancing the quality of classical ballet teaching in Western Australia through collectively sharing knowledge and best practices in teaching.

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Message from the Chair

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter for the WA Classical Ballet Teachers' Association.

We are thrilled to have you in our membership, where we are united by a shared passion for the art of classical ballet and a commitment to excellence in teaching. Our members benefit from a wealth of expertise, support, and resources that are designed to elevate the standards and practices of ballet instruction across the state.

At WACBTA, we believe in the transformative power of ballet to inspire and enrich the lives of our students. Through our regular workshops, seminars, and networking events, we aim to foster a collaborative environment where teachers can exchange ideas, refine their techniques, and stay abreast of the latest developments in ballet pedagogy.

Our successful activities are a testament to the steadfast support of our committees and the exceptional work carried out by our dedicated committee members. Their tireless efforts and unwavering commitment have been instrumental in organizing and executing a wide array of programs that benefit our members and enrich our community.

As we embark on this journey together, we encourage you to actively participate in our initiatives, share your insights, and contribute to the vibrant tapestry of our association. Your involvement is key to our collective growth and success. Thank you for being a part of the WA Classical Ballet Teachers' Association. We look forward to achieving great things together and making a lasting impact on the future of ballet education in Western Australia.

Read on. There are some wonderful contributions from our dedicated followers.

Helene Gowers

Corporate Membership

by Robyn Cooper



What is it and why should you consider it?

- Do you have at least 3 teachers in your studio?
- Are you interested in making their busy teaching lives easier?
- Would you like them to have access to information from experts about aspects of teaching and student management?
- Would you like them to access Personal Development sessions at discounted rates?

Then you should seriously consider signing up for one of WACBTA'S Corporate Memberships. Studios may pay a yearly fee of \$185 per calendar year to become a Corporate Member.

This fee will allow an unlimited number of teachers from that studio to access member benefits under the umbrella of the studio's corporate membership. This entitles the teachers listed under the studio's corporate membership to discounted rates for educational events offered by WACBTA, and to any other member benefits offered from time to time.

For 2025, we are planning a mixture of in-person and online content to assist teachers, and you could be a part of our exciting programme! So join up now!



JOIN NOW



The Importance of Qualifications

by Stephen Hale - WACTBA Committee member



The importance of teaching qualifications is important for several reasons:

Maintaining Standards:

Teaching qualifications play a crucial role in upholding the high standards of classical ballet instruction. Ballet is a highly technical and disciplined art form that requires a deep understanding of its principles and techniques. Qualified teachers bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their students, ensuring that they receive proper training in the classical ballet tradition. By adhering to established teaching standards and methods, qualified teachers help preserve the integrity and authenticity of the art form.

Ensuring Safety:

Ballet involves intricate and physically demanding movements that require precise technique and alignment. Qualified teachers are trained to prioritize the safety and well-being of their students by teaching proper body mechanics, alignment, and injury prevention techniques. Through their expertise, qualified teachers can significantly reduce the risk of dance-related injuries and create a safe learning environment for students of all ages and levels.

Effective Teaching Methods:

Teaching qualifications equip the ballet instructors with a diverse set of teaching strategies and methodologies to cater to the individual needs and learning styles of their students. Qualified teachers possess the skills to break down complex ballet movements into manageable components, provide constructive feedback, and create a supportive learning environment that fosters student growth and development. By employing effective teaching methods, qualified ballet teachers can enhance the learning experience and facilitate student progress more efficiently.

Understanding of Anatomy, Physiology, and Developmental Milestones:

A deep understanding of human anatomy, physiology, and developmental stages is essential for ballet teachers to guide their students towards proper alignment, technique, and physical development.

Qualified ballet teachers are well-versed in the biomechanics of movement and understand how to tailor their instruction to support the physical growth and well-being of their students. By incorporating this knowledge into their teaching practice, qualified ballet teachers can help students achieve optimal performance outcomes while minimizing the risk of injury.

Professionalism:

Acquiring recognized teaching qualifications demonstrates a teacher's commitment to their craft and their dedication to ongoing professional development. By obtaining formal credentials, ballet teachers showcase their expertise, credibility, and professionalism within the dance community. Qualified teachers are more likely to uphold ethical teaching practices, engage in reflective teaching approaches, and contribute positively to the field of ballet education. Additionally, qualifications serve as a mark of distinction and quality assurance for students and parents seeking reputable dance instruction.

Career Opportunities:

Holding teaching qualifications can significantly expand career opportunities for ballet teachers. Accredited certifications and degrees in dance education can open doors to teaching positions at prestigious dance schools, conservatories, and performing arts institutions. Additionally, qualified teachers may have access to specialized training programs, professional development opportunities, and networking events that can further enhance their skills and advance their careers in the field of ballet education. By investing in their professional growth and development, ballet teachers can position themselves for greater success and recognition within the professional dance industry.

Continued Education:

Teaching qualifications require ongoing professional development and continuing education to ensure that instructors stay current with the latest teaching methodologies, dance trends, and best practices in ballet education. Through workshops, seminars, conferences, and advanced training programs, qualified teachers have the opportunity to expand their knowledge base, refine their teaching techniques, and stay abreast of industry changes. By engaging in lifelong learning and professional growth, ballet teachers can continuously improve their teaching skills, broaden their perspectives, and remain at the forefront of innovation in dance education.

In summary, teaching qualifications are indispensable for ballet teachers seeking to excel in the field of classical ballet instruction. By maintaining high standards, prioritizing student safety, employing effective teaching methods, understanding anatomy and physiology, demonstrating professionalism, seizing career opportunities, and pursuing continued education, qualified instructors can elevate their teaching practice, enhance their credibility, and enrich the learning experiences of their students. Through a commitment to excellence and ongoing professional development, ballet teachers with qualifications can make a lasting impact on the art of ballet and inspire the next generation of dancers to reach their full potential.



CHOREOGRAPHY = The art of composing dance and movement

by Barbara Thomas WACBTA Committee



The R.A.D. Festival of Dance, held each June, has a section given over to Students' own Choreography. They are responsible for finding the music, organising the costume, as well as producing the choreography by themselves.

Students are of all ages and have amazed both Judges and Audiences with their arrangements. Young students especially have delighted us with their work which has won places for males and females.

The work has improved year by year and has now reached a very high standard in all areas of dance – classical, contemporary and demi character.

So, how to start? Just start to move. There is no right or wrong way to go about it. Perhaps hum a tune, listen to some music, or try out some steps.

Do you wish to tell a story, follow a theme, or evoke a feeling? Fit your movements to the music using the sounds to guide you. The more you practice the more you learn.

Be sure to check that you are permitted to use the music you have chosen, and refrain from using well known pieces. And finally- just enjoy the experience.

From the Music Desk

by Michael Brett, pianist, WA Ballet



I only started playing for ballet as a way of earning extra money to buy lovely shoes. I was in my first year at the University of Auckland and it seemed like a good idea at the time... the advert that appeared on my student hostel noticeboard asked for a pianist (tick) that could sight-read (tick) and was available on Saturday mornings (tick, although after a Friday night with my friends, maybe not so keen). I applied, auditioned for the ballet teacher, and got the job. The rest, as they say, is history.

I was fortunate. The ballet school happened to be one of the top schools in Auckland and I was treated to excellent teaching, lovely students, and a work ethic that has, for the most part, has ceased to exist. They were passionate, some might say obsessed, however I learnt so much about technique and musicality. I am enormously grateful for my experiences in those early years – over 40 years ago – that shaped my craft.

I well remember playing for my first open classes. I was terrified, not only at the prospect of having to play without the security of set syllabus music, but also playing for the teacher. Dorothea Ashbridge had trained in London and danced with The Royal Ballet and was incredibly glamorous. She taught the open classes once a week with a rod of iron that engendered fear and respect in equal measure and, eventually, a deep love for her. I will always remember her words to me one day, "You know, Michael, it's always so much better when you improvise." Why? Through improvisation I was able to give the dancers exactly what they needed in terms of accent, motivation, rhythm, phrasing, expression, and style – a true collaboration between music and dance.



Holistic Health for Dancers: Nurturing Your Body and Mind

by Deborah Roberts - facebook.com/templeoflongevity



Dancing is a vibrant form of self-expression that brings joy, creativity, and connection to your body. For young women aged 16 to 26, dance can be a fulfilling pursuit, but it also comes with physical and mental challenges. Embracing an holistic approach to health can enhance your performance and overall wellbeing by addressing inflammation, preventing injuries, and maintaining mental health.

Addressing Inflammation

Inflammation is a common response to the physical demands of dance. While it is a natural part of recovery, chronic inflammation can lead to discomfort and hinder your performance. Here are some strategies to help manage inflammation effectively:

- **Prioritize Anti-Inflammatory Foods:** Incorporate foods like fatty fish (such as salmon), nuts, seeds, fruits, and vegetables into your meals. These foods are rich in omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants, which help reduce inflammation and support overall health.
- **Stay Hydrated:** Proper hydration is crucial for muscle function and recovery. Aim to drink plenty of water throughout the day, especially before and after dance classes. Herbal teas, such as chamomile or green tea, can provide additional anti-inflammatory benefits.
- **Integrate Recovery Techniques:** Regular practices like foam rolling, gentle stretching, or yoga can help alleviate muscle tightness and promote recovery. These methods enhance blood circulation, reducing inflammation and preparing your body for the next dance session.

Avoiding Injury

Injury prevention is essential for every dancer, particularly for young women who are passionate about honing their craft. Here are some key strategies to keep injuries at bay:

- **Establish a Comprehensive Warm-Up Routine:** Begin every dance session with a thorough warm-up. Spend 10-15 minutes doing dynamic stretches and movements that target major muscle groups. This prepares your body for activity and helps reduce the risk of strains.
- **Incorporate Strength Training:** Building strength is vital for maintaining balance and preventing injuries. Focus on exercises that enhance core stability and support your joints, such as squats, lunges, and planks. Aim for two to three strength training sessions per week to complement your dance practice.
- **Listen to Your Body:** Being in tune with your body is critical. If you experience discomfort or fatigue, give yourself permission to rest. Recognizing when to take a break can prevent more serious injuries down the line.

Maintaining Mental Wellbeing

Mental health is a vital component of your overall dance experience. The pressures of performance and self-expectation can be challenging, but nurturing your mental wellbeing is essential for sustaining your passion. Here are some strategies to foster a positive mindset:

- **Practice Mindfulness:** Incorporate mindfulness techniques, such as meditation or deep breathing exercises, into your daily routine. Even a few minutes of mindfulness can help reduce stress and improve focus, allowing you to connect more deeply with your dance.
- **Engage in Reflective Journaling:** Take time to write about your dance experiences, feelings, and aspirations. Journaling can enhance self-awareness and provide clarity on your journey, helping you process emotions and celebrate your achievements.
- **Build a Supportive Network:** Surround yourself with positive, encouraging family, friends, and fellow dancers. Participating in group classes or workshops, either in dance or other creative arts, can reduce any sense of isolation and help foster a sense of community, where you can share experiences and support one another.

By adopting an holistic approach that addresses inflammation, emphasizes injury prevention, and nurtures mental wellbeing, young dancers can thrive in their passion for dance. Embrace these strategies to cultivate a balanced and fulfilling dance practice. Remember, dancing is not just about perfecting movements; it is about enjoying the journey and expressing your unique self. With the right care and mindfulness, you can dance with vitality and joy for years to come.



What Is the Most Powerful Way to Accelerate Your Dancers' Progress?

by Mariah-Jane Thies - radiantdancer.com



Is it introducing a groundbreaking strengthening exercise? The perfect image to finally unlock their understanding of posture? Or perhaps a foolproof way to ensure they always remember to point their feet? After years of teaching and dedicated research, my answer may surprise you. It matters far less what you are teaching—or even how you are teaching—than the environment in which the teaching and learning exchange takes place.

Of course, the what and how are essential. I strongly advocate for thoughtful curriculum design, focusing on incremental progressions that build confidence and ensure success. These approaches not only strengthen technical skills but also foster self-esteem and develop intrinsic motivation. Likewise, the use of vivid imagery and precise language can profoundly impact students' ability to understand and apply technical concepts, while nurturing artistry.

However, without the right learning environment as the foundation, even the best teaching methods fall short.

The Cornerstone of Progress: A Sense of Community

True learning can only happen when students feel safe—physically, emotionally, and mentally. This foundational sense of safety allows the brain to absorb, process, and store information effectively. Without it, perceived threats can hijack the brain, pushing students into the limbic system (the emotional brain) or the reactive, survival-oriented areas of the brain.

In such states, real learning cannot take place. Students may appear to be engaged, but they aren't able to retain or apply knowledge meaningfully. This is why you may find yourself reteaching the same concepts repeatedly—whether it's polishing a step every time it appears in choreography or reminding a dancer to use proper alignment in every arabesque.

When dancers feel they belong to a supportive and inclusive community within the class, a profound sense of safety emerges. This activates the prefrontal cortex—the area of the brain responsible for higher learning—and creates the conditions for natural retention, application, and artistry to flourish.

Building a Culture of Safety and Belonging

Cultivating a sense of community is the cornerstone of creating an optimal learning environment. It goes beyond just teaching steps; it's about fostering connections, mutual respect, and a shared purpose among your students.

In future articles, I will dive deeper into practical strategies for building and maintaining a sense of community within your studio. For now, I encourage you to reflect on this concept. What small actions can you take today to create a greater sense of connection and belonging within your classes?

When we prioritize the learning environment, we create a space where dancers can thrive—not just in their technique, but as individuals who feel valued and supported. And that, ultimately, is where true progress begins.



Artistry in Dance

by Claire Voss - vossmoves.com



In 2024, ballet and its technique has evolved tremendously and can sometimes be to the detriment of Artistry.

But what is Artistry and how do we make sure we still incorporate artistry in our Ballet class?

Mikhail Baryshnikov said:

"My jump is not high enough, my turns aren't perfect, I can't get my leg behind my ear." Please do not do that. Sometimes there is an obsession with technique that can kill your best impulses. But communicating with an art form means being vulnerable. Being imperfect. And most of the time this is much more interesting. Trust me."

By focusing only on pure technique and perfection around it, we can block our inner self and instinct when it comes to dancing. I had a ballet mistress from London who used to tell us: "when you are working on a role and try to develop the artistry, the technique will go a little bit, then you focus on the technique and the artistry goes a little bit, until you reach where you want to be". That is why it is ok sometimes to let the students or dancers to experiment their own artistry and to allow their technique to be imperfect. Once they do experience the feelings of movement or character then it is time to correct the technique and vice versa.

I often like to allow my students to focus purely on their artistry in certain exercises, the result is that usually the dancer's technique will follow when they find their artistry and sense of freedom when dancing.

Musicality is also a big component in artistry, allowing the students and dancers to really feel the music, to breathe it and to let it guide our dance and emotions.

Mr B used to say: "See the music, hear the dance".

I am also a strong believer that artistry comes from feeling the music and breath. I encourage teachers to do exercises for their students when the task is to close their eyes and really get in touch with the emotions that the music makes them feel.

Where do they feel it? What was the image that came to their mind? And then to use this information for an exercise.

Dancers are portraying a lot of emotions through their body and movement, the way dancers use their feet, arms to portray emotions are vital.

I like to put emphasis on the foot and toe work in exercises, feet and toes should reflect on the music, and arms/back are also a bit focused on emotions we want to express.

Lastly, help your dancers by asking them to relate to a situation they have lived and emotions they have felt already.

I believe that kids can still understand how to portray a lot of emotions if guided through situations they might have lived and felt in their lives.

Ask them 'how did they feel?' then guide them through the emotions we are trying to portray.

I think we can incorporate these notions early on and have classes where you do focus on artistry. I also like to play them orchestra music and not always piano music to start awakening a musical and emotional awareness in them.

I am also a big believer that to be a great artist one must live at its fullest to be able to feel and portray emotions on stage. Allow kids to be kids (outside the ballet studio (ha ha ha) let them experience life and encourage them to be interested in other arts to be inspired.

I have developed a movement workshop to help artists be more comfortable with their movement and portraying emotions on stage, I have had the chance to work with the young Artist of the WA Opera and the results were magnificent. This workshop can be adapted and be beneficial to any kind of dance and I invite you to contact me if you have further questions.

*"See the music,
hear the dance"*



March 16th

Improve your musicality with Sandrine Delasalle Scannella
Boost your allegro proficiency and power with Denise Nunn
Develop your choreographic skills with Jayne Smeulders

6 April

Boys' Club with David McAllister plus special event
Boys' Strength with Isaac Campbell - West Australian Ballet, Physio head
Dancer Health and Nutrition with Simone Allen Sports Dietitian - West
Australian Ballet & Jenny Woods

11 May

Boys' Club with Christian Luck

22nd June

Pilates, postural awareness with Claire Voss, Tania Shillington
EBAS (Elemental Body Alignment System) with Scott Putman/Robyn
Cooper

June & September - Dates to be confirmed

Boys' Club - Extra Classes!

Thanks to the incredible support from our boys and their families, we
have added two more Boys' Club sessions!

