

**Journal Entry #17**  
**April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

### **From Ballet to Modern Dance: The Fifth Young Choreographers' Competition**

In one of my previous journal articles, I discussed the choreography competition in which I partook in March. This competition had been organized by *The Saint Petersburg Conservatory* and emphasized ballet choreography and classical repertoire. Last week, I participated in a second competition, which was entirely different. *The Fifth Young Choreographers' Competition* forbid *all* ballet choreography and only accepted entries in the forms of modern, jazz and experimental dance. Thus, in the past month, I have gone from performing classical ballet solos to choreographing edgy modern choreography to pop style American music.

#### ***Choosing the Theme***

I selected a piece of music called *Touched* performed by the American group *Vast*. The piece I wanted to choreograph was a trio depicting a love triangle between two girls and a young man. The movement styles of the two female dancers contrast: one is a young, gentle girl who is submissive and obedient; the other is an aggressive, passionate female who lacks the natural beauty and femininity of the other. At the beginning of the dance, the male and the gentle girl dance together and share moments of romance, while the fiery independent female tries to disrupt this love and attract the attention of the male. In the end, the arrogance and confidence of the male sidesteps both the girls. He "throws" them out of his life, feeling he is capable of attracting someone superior to either of these females.

The passionate and emotional nature of the dance called for dancers with the technique and dedication to commit themselves to hours of rehearsals in order to understand both the movements and the characterizations embedded in my choreography.

#### ***Rehearsing Russian Dancers***

I cast two dancers from *The Vaganova Ballet Academy* in Saint Petersburg to perform the roles of the beautiful female and the male. I took the role of the garish female myself.

At the beginning of our rehearsals, it was difficult for me to convince the classically-trained ballet students to attempt the new, modern movements in my choreography. They resisted this style believing that the choreography was "wrong"; "it's not beautiful," they repeatedly told me. On the contrary, I explained, "only non-beautiful movements suit this music and the story we are portraying."

I prepared translations of the English lyrics in the music, and gave the dancers descriptions of the themes and characters in my choreography. After this, the two young Russian dancers began to understand my choreographic vision. In the end, the piece came together to my satisfaction, but it took many hours in the studio to get to this point.

#### ***The Competition Process***

I submitted a written application to *The Young Choreographers' Competition* one month prior to the competition date. After that, I had to pass a preliminary audition in which I performed my dance before the screening committee. I successfully passed this stage and was admitted into the formal competition.

As the event drew near, I organized rehearsals for lighting and sound cues on the stage. My mother mailed me costumes from the USA for my dancers, and this proved a good way of saving a few extra rubles!

***And The Winner Is...***

Before I knew it, it was the night of the competition. Backstage, we reviewed the most difficult sequences and some of the lifts. My dancers and I had become close friends through sweat, tears, and laughter during our hours of rehearsals. Now it was time to show the results of our work to the judges and the audience.

I was happy with our performance, especially the emotional intensity with which we performed. Some of the technical elements and the unison were not as precise as it should have been for a professional competition, and these shortcomings disappointed me. Nevertheless, the response from the audience was positive. My ballet teachers, who had only seen me perform classical technique before, were shocked at the aggressive and emotional style of my choreography and presentation.

Upon the conclusion of the event, the judges decided not to award the traditional “grand prize” to any of the choreographers; instead, the best dances were invited to be performed at the Gala Concert, which concluded the week’s festival. My piece was one of the four selected for the Gala Concert – and thus, we had the chance to perform once again. The Gala Concert included works by visiting guest artists from Yekaterinburg, Denmark, and the USA (choreographer and teacher: Bob Boross, California).

It was a privilege and an excellent experience for me to have my choreography showcased in this setting. Next time, however, I am planning on bringing home the grand prize!

***To Learn More About Rebecca Davis’ studies and travel experiences, visit The Rebecca Davis Dance Company at [www.rebeccadavidance.com](http://www.rebeccadavidance.com) or email [davis@rebeccadavidance.com](mailto:davis@rebeccadavidance.com)***

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