

Journal Entry #11
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A Dancer's Worst Nightmare: Getting Injured in Russia

A Dancer's Worst Nightmare

Every single dancer dreads getting injured - not because of the pain that inevitably results, but because it means time away from the studio while your body heals. Time away from the studio means lost chances to learn repertoire and choreography. This is exactly the situation in which I have found myself.

"The Incident"

What happened? Last week, I was rehearsing choreography that I recently set for a jazz dance trio at The Saint Petersburg Academic Ballet Theater. The piece is being prepared for a jazz-modern dance competition that will be held in Saint Petersburg in April. I am one of the three dancers in the trio, and we were practicing the jump section when I landed from a split leap on the side of my left ankle. My foot immediately gave out, and I went crashing to the floor. It took me a few seconds to realize what had happened. When I stood up, I instantly knew that it had been a bad fall. My two partners looked at me. I reassured them I was fine ("Все Нормально!"), but my ankle started swelling and became increasingly painful. Nevertheless, when you are in the middle of rehearsing your own choreography, there is only one option in such a situation: keep dancing! The whimpering started afterwards when I was in the dressing room, and the tears started falling during the *long* walk back to the metro station and the dormitory.

Words of Wisdom from The Russians

I believe almost every single thing the Russian dancers tell me about ballet, so there is no reason to think that I would not take their advice on dance injuries. One of my good friends, who also trains at The Academic Ballet Theater and is a current student at The Vaganova Ballet Academy, told me to put hot creams on the swollen area and wrap it in a soft band while dancing. And, if her words of wisdom weren't enough, she readily gave me one of her own bandages and her mother bought me a Russian cream.

One of my Russian teachers told me to use a cold compress at night and nothing during the day. She said no gels were necessary, and that a loose bandage during practice was enough. My friend at The Conservatory, who is a dancer from China, told me to soak my foot in cold water for hours. Even the cleaning lady started giving me advice after she saw me hobbling around the studios.

Training Continues...

When I showed up for class the day after the incident, my private Russian coach looked at my ankle, and said, "are you planning on dancing on that?" My black and red foot was too big to fit into my ballet shoe, so I had wrapped it up in a sock. I re-confirmed that, "it was only my left ankle, and there was still lots I could do. For example...(long pause)...arm movements or stretching?" She looked at me for a moment, and then said, "well, let's get going."

What followed was one of the best classes I have had in the last few weeks. My coach worked with me on static body positions with such detail that I learned just as much mentally as I did physically. The movements we practiced were simple, but fundamental for complicated turns and jumps. My coach assured me that I would learn the more difficult steps faster if I mastered this foundation. Here is a testament of the genius of my Russian coach – she is able to adapt to a multitude of different training conditions and impart invaluable knowledge and training to her students every single time.

Hobbling and Healing

After one week, I am still hobbling around the Saint Petersburg dance studios with my left foot in a sock and my right foot in a ballet shoe. I have continued with all of my rehearsals and most of my technique classes. The Russian "dance injury techniques" seem to be working because my foot has improved every day. However, I am still not able to rise on my left foot or jump. Unsurprisingly, this is very frustrating – both as a dancer and as a choreographer – because it is preventing me from building my strength and actively constructing new choreography to my fullest potential. It is even more frustrating given that I have so little precious time here in Russia.

Getting injured is a dancer's worst nightmare, especially for a dancer of my age (already 22 years). On the other hand, I can't imagine training for a year in Russia without getting injured at least once. I think it should be part of my tuition fees for The Saint Petersburg Conservatory!