

Journal Entry #16

April 15th, 2005

The Show Without An Audience: Performing Works in Progress

This week I performed four selections from my most recent modern-ballet choreography for Nikolai Boyarchikov, my teacher at The Saint Petersburg Conservatory and The Artistic Director of The Mussorgsky Ballet. This informal concert was an important step in my choreographic studies and furthering my relationship with Boyarchikov.

The Show Without An Audience

With the help of my private ballet coach, *Elena Ivanovna*, I arranged for my performance to be held at *The Petukhov Theater* in Saint Petersburg. I coordinated the schedules of my dancers, and we set the date for Sunday, April 17th.

The purpose of this concert was to show my works in progress to Boyarchikov in a setting where he could see the dances performed with costumes and stage lighting. I decided to make the concert an “interactive dress rehearsal”, rather than a show open to the general public.

The second purpose of the concert was to videotape my works. A fellow Fulbright scholar specializing in camera/video production did the videography. I also had a Russian photographer attend our dress rehearsal the day before to do a photo shoot. Thus, this little idea of “showing my choreography to my teacher” quickly turned into the entire planning and organization of a professional performance. At the same time, I was continuing my ballet training to build my stamina and technique as I would also be performing. I found myself faced with the challenge that all artists face who perform the dual roles of artistic director and general manager: creating art and running the business at the same time.

The Dancers and The Dances

On the day of the performance, I greeted Boyarchikov and gave him “my playbill”, long summaries of the themes of my works and translations of the English lyrics.

The first of the four pieces was a modern variation to Bach’s *Invention 15*, which I performed as a solo. It was titled *To Be or Not To Be?* and depicted a young girl exploring a changing world.

The second piece was performed by *Alona Kochikova*, a soloist at *The Mussorgsky Ballet*. Alona had asked me to choreograph a modern dance for her, and together we had selected a contemporary piece of music performed by *Nine Inch Nails*. Entitled *Barrier*, Alona dances with a shirt symbolizing captivity; it prevents her from reaching her goals and living life to the fullest.

The third piece, *Life-Time-War*, was a solo I performed, contrasting a soft lyrical style with a staccato robotic style of dance. The final piece, *Temptation*, was a trio performed by two students of *The Vaganova Academy* and myself. I have prepared *Temptation* for *The Young Choreographers’ Competition* that will take place at the end of this month in Saint Petersburg. (To see a clip of this dance, visit the video section of my website: www.rebeccadaviddance.com)

The performance went smoothly, and I was happy with the work of my professional dancers. The most useful part of the day followed: critical feedback and suggestions from Boyarchikov.

Teaching Choreography

Boyarchikov, a famous choreographer himself, said two things in particular that really struck me. First, he said that I must search further to find the climax in each piece. “There must be a point in every dance where the audience is surprised or shocked. It must be clearly identifiable and energetic.” Second, he recognized that I portray psychological dramas in all of my dances; they are works depicting people living life, not simply dancing beautiful ballet steps.

“Your psychology is extremely sophisticated, but you have to make these ideas simple and understandable to the common people, the people sitting in the audience.” This can be achieved by precisely choosing each and every movement and showing contrast within the choreography.

Building The Relationship

This show without an audience was important in continuing to build my student-teacher relationship with Boyarchikov. Following the competition at The Conservatory in March, I was worried that Boyarchikov had “dismissed me” as a serious choreographer, but this concert gave me the chance to show him choreography that is closer to my personal style of movement. He realized that I have been working hard and preparing several different pieces, some of which are being performed by professional Russian ballerinas. I still have a long way to go in fully developing my choreographic art, but this was a step forward in my lifelong artistic journey.

To Learn More About Rebecca Davis’ studies and travel experiences, visit The Rebecca Davis Dance Company at www.rebeccadavidance.com or email davis@rebeccadavidance.com

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