

MAG ZINE
DANCE



Robin Dunn, front in yellow, teaches hip hop at the Ailey Extension in New York.

Breaking Into Teaching

Tips to Land Part-time Teaching Gigs

BY THERESA RUTH HOWARD

As professional dancers, we know all too well the long breaks between gigs (and paychecks). While it may seem like waiting tables is the only way to pad your purse, teaching can be the perfect temp job, offering cash, flexibility, and the possibility of permanence. It's also a great way to put all your years of dance experience to use.

Arthur Coopchik, Courtesy Dunn

But keep in mind there is a difference between taking on a teaching gig—which can fill the holes in your schedule and your bank account—and the vocation of *being* a teacher, which carries with it the responsibility of training bodies, minds, and spirits. (Listings start on this page for opportunities to train yourself to be a full-time teacher.)

I began teaching when a fellow dancer asked me to sub for him at a school that teaches ballet, modern, and tap in Brooklyn. The class went off without a hitch, and it became a regular gig. Since

some work. Send your query *before* the semester starts and know what you want to offer when you make the pitch. Be persistent: If they can't invite you that semester, connect again before the next. (However, if you hope to become more than an adjunct, know that most schools require an MFA degree.)

For the dancer who has toured internationally, some of the connections you made on the road can come in handy. Christopher Huggins, an Ailey grad who is now a choreographer, has been teaching internationally for over 18 years. "In

"Your people skills are as essential as your teaching skills." —Christopher Huggins

then I have taught in outreach, public and after-school programs, universities, dance festivals, and institutions like The Ailey School. I have taught in churches with carpets, cafeterias, gyms, ballrooms, classrooms, theaters, and dance studios. I have done it pick-up, part-time, full-time, and privates, domestic and international. If you want to teach, the questions are: How do you find the work? And how do you prepare for it?

ASSESS YOUR ASSETS

To start, update your resumé and see where you stand. The beauty and the beast of the dance world is its connectedness; it's all about whom you know and who knows you. Get clear about your skill level and quite honestly, who you are in the dance world. If you have danced in a major company or show, or have studied under a "master," this broadens your possibilities. Open studios are often eager to hire dancers with high-profile resúmes. This is precisely how Alexandra Beller (formerly with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company) got her first opportunity to teach at Dancespace (now Dance New Amsterdam). "It was packed because Bill T. Jones had an audition coming up. I hadn't really taught before. Thirty minutes in, I realized that I hadn't looked up or made eye contact with anyone," says Beller, now an independent choreographer who regularly teaches at universities.

Academia is another fertile pond. Often a simple e-mail inquiring about teaching a master class or workshop along with your resumé might yield

that first class I taught in France, there were people from Switzerland, Italy, all over Europe, some were looking for teachers for their own dance intensives and that's how I started to get booked."

Novices should know that while there is no replacement for formal teacher training, there is a place for all those with training and hands-on skills. Local schools are a great source of work. An enthusiastic, energetic new teacher might be welcomed. Don't be shy: Cold call or pop in—it never hurts to ask.

Most arts organizations have outreach programs. While you may not have the experience—or flexibility in your schedule—to be on a school faculty, you may be a perfect fit for an organization's offsite work. It can be challenging, but seeing children with no previous exposure touched by dance can make you feel like a superhero!

LIKE VERIZON, WORK YOUR NETWORK!

Spread the word that you're interested in teaching. If you dance with a company, that's the first place to start. Let your director know you want to teach, and volunteer to do a residency or outreach. It worked for American Ballet Theatre soloist Craig Salstein. While still a member of ABT's Studio Company (now ABT II), Salstein asked then-director John Meehan if he could teach class. "I wanted to try to stand in front of a room and make a difference." Now he gives company class while on tour with ABT.

Buy the trade papers and check out

TEACHER TRAINING COURSES

If you find you enjoy teaching enough to consider it a career option, here are some ways to acquire more formal credentials:

American Academy of Ballet
Teacher's Intensive
Purchase College, NY
212.787.9500
www.american-academy-of-ballet.com

American Ballet Theatre
National Training Program
Multiple locations
212.477.3030 x3012
www.abt.org/education/national-trainingcurr.asp

American Tap Dance Institute
Teacher Training
Multiple locations
atdi@usatap.org
www.usatap.org

Broadway Dance Center
Teacher Workshop
NYC
888.627.7067
www.thepulseontour.com

Canada's National Ballet School
Teacher Training Program & Summer Seminar
Toronto, Ontario
416.964.3780
www.nationalballetschool.org

Dance Educators of America
Teacher Training & Certification Program
NYC and Las Vegas, NV
914.636.3200
www.deadance.com

Dance Masters of America
Teachers Training School & Teachers Training Masters Program
Buffalo, NY
716.645.6898
www.dma-national.org

Dance Masters of America
Teachers Training School West
Long Beach, CA
716.645.6898
www.dma-national.org

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those bulletin boards you pass by every day at the open studios. Often there are ads for teachers. Perhaps revisit the place you trained. Most studios and schools have a list of substitutes—get your name on it. Approach your local gym about giving a class. Look for an opportunity to tap your resources.

BE YOUR OWN MANAGER

In order to get the classes booked, you must be persistent. Make the calls, write the e-mails, and follow up. When you know you are going to be available for work, tell prospective employers well in advance so that they can keep you in mind. Once you feel you can deliver a great class, get the word out. Use all of your resources: flyers, e-blasts, Facebook, MySpace, and word of mouth. Think of it as a business, because it is—yours.

TEACH WHAT YOU KNOW

When “picking up” classes you might be tempted to take anything that comes your way regardless of whether or not it suits you. Be clear about what techniques you are qualified to teach. Being in front of a class requires a high level of confidence and command, so it’s best to be secure in the form in which you’re teaching. “If you’re going to teach hip hop,” says long-time teacher Robin Dunn, “you have a knowledge of the culture, the history, and the foundation—locking, popping, b-boying, and house dancing.”

Teaching open class can be tricky. Merceditas Mañago-Alexander, currently on faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, says, “I still get nervous if I have to teach an open class, because you never know what you’re going to get. Generally I have an idea of what I’d like to do but I have to start out basic and see what’s possible.” It’s not necessary to reinvent the wheel; just teach a good class.

When substituting, be sure that you teach something that’s in tune with what the students are used to. Be sensitive to your audience—after all it is *their* class. You also have to think about the ages of the students. For instance, teaching adults or professional students is a different skill set from teaching children. You can hone your skills in the teacher training courses mentioned in our sidebar.

To be invited back, both the studio owner and the students have to like you, so your people skills are as essential as

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Harkness Dance Center

Dance Education Laboratory
NYC
212.415.5552
www.92y.org

Lincoln Center Institute

National and International Educator
Workshop
Multiple locations
212.875.5535
www.lcidb.org

Musicworks

Teacher’s Tours
Multiple locations
866.493.7400
www.musicworksunlimited.com

National Dance Institute

Teaching Artist Training
NYC
212.226.0083
www.nationaldance.org/programs_teacher.htm

National Dance Institute of New Mexico

Teaching Excellence Teacher Training
Santa Fe, NM
505.983.7646
www.ndi-nm.org

Royal Winnipeg Ballet School

Teacher Training Program
Winnipeg, Canada
204.957.3467
www.rwbschool.com

Check out the Dance Magazine College Guide to find out about universities that offer pedagogy courses and degrees.

your teaching skills. Be ready for anything—bad floors, no mirrors, bad speakers—and make the best of it. “I am very low maintenance,” says Huggins. “If I’m unhappy with the situation, my students will never know. I just make it work.”

The more integrity you have about the work that you do, the more work you will generate. Whether you do it part-time or full, remember that with all the years you have taken class, you now have something to share. Huggins offers this final thought: “Reflect on the teachers you had, they are your touchstones. They were once where you are now.”

Teresa Ruth Howard is a NYC dancer, writer, and teacher.