

FROM OUR ARCHIVES



Catching Up With Shawn Byfield

BY GRACE WELLS-SMITH

Byfield Dance Experience, owned by dancer and teacher Shawn Byfield, is closing up shop at the

end of March 2019, just before its tenth birthday.

For the April 2005 issue, before Byfield opened his own “hub,” he told writer Susan Kendal that he was “delighted” to see hip hop classes going mainstream. At the time, he was renting studio space around the city and teaching his own tap and hip hop classes.

Now, because of rising rent in Toronto,

Byfield is joining the league of artists and teachers who have been priced out of their homes. “Yonge street is too expensive,” says Byfield.

However, he isn’t simply moving on because of expenses; he also says he feels like the universe is pushing him in another direction. That direction is all over the country.

He now wants to travel – teaching master classes and workshops to a wider range of people. His goal is to inspire and bring joy. “I’ve always been one to just kind of encourage and empower people to just be better versions of themselves,” he says. “I knew from an early age, I was born like a wired encourager.”

Whether it be painting, gardening or, of course, dancing, he wants people to be inspired to jump in. “I want them to know they can do the things and take the leaps. See what I did there?” he says. Laughs, actually.

In addition to his dance career, Byfield is a certified public speaker, often hosting public events. He is a Dora Mavor Moore-award-winning choreographer (outstanding new musical), and Gemini Award nominee.

With all of his skills, he’s hoping to host workshops where he will not only teach but also host talks and interviews. “I need to be out there in the minds of others who haven’t experienced what I have to offer yet,” he says. “And see how that goes.” ■

The International Dance School Directors’ Committee Standardizes Audition Procedures

BY JILLIAN GROENING

As of 2018, dancers graduating from training programs will have an easier time auditioning for professional opportunities.

The International Dance School Director’s Committee to Standardize Audition Procedures (C-SAP) has announced the creation of a standard set of guidelines for pre-selection for auditions. The initiative grew out of Canada’s National Ballet School (NBS)’s Assemblée Internationale (AI) 2017 in response to concerns over varied and conflicting audition requirements being requested of graduating students.

According to NBS artistic director and CEO Mavis Staines, one of the many benefits of AI is that the event allows school directors from around the globe to step out of their daily routines to reflect on how things are progressing and where systemic change needs to take place. While there are certain patterns training schools follow that remain helpful, others tend to exist out of sheer habit. One challenging pattern was graduating dance artists having to make a different audition tape for every company they were submitting to.

“The twenty-one directors and staff from [the training organizations present at AI 2017] looked at one another and said

‘Let’s celebrate the power of collaboration,’” Staines recalls. By connecting with company directors, a collection of protocols was proposed. “It was really exciting because within a week of putting them in front of directors from fifteen of the world’s major companies, all were on board and that number has just increased.”

This now means that aspiring dancers poised to start their careers have just one audition video to make. The video begins with the dancer performing a classical and a contemporary variation, which is then followed by detailed classwork. This streamlined ten-minute video is a huge help for directors, who may be viewing over 400 audition videos.

“I think of the beautiful symbol of the willingness of the community to come together and problem solve,” Staines says of the collaborative initiative. “I think that is part of the power of being unified by this impassioned love of the arts and of dance.”

The committee is open to feedback on how the new protocols are working for students and directors alike.

Learn more or share your experience >>
iapguidelines.squarespace.com