

The World Is Their Stage

Carolyn Curwen

The world is their stage. Dance and acting is their language. They perform with passion, desire, commitment, drive, determination, ingenuity, talent and creativity. These are highly skilled alumni of UCSB's Theater and Dance BFA programs. Under the tutelage of Professors Pilafian, Colahan, Appel and others, our students emerge as polished dance and theater professionals from one of the most well regarded programs in the nation. Recently, ten alumni shared their fascinating journeys into a career in theater or dance and offer insights into networking, perseverance, lessons learned and words of wisdom that are relevant no matter what your major.

If I heard it from one of them, I heard it from all of them. It, the job search and career success, is all about networking, making connections with all sorts of people, and then developing and nurturing those relationships. Aisha Kabia (2002), now appearing in *How I met your Mother*, *House* and other TV shows, spent three seasons with the Oregon Shakespeare Company participating in over 500 performances after graduating from UCSB. Some time during the second season, she met another actress who gave her the business card of an agent in LA. Aisha put it away not even giving it a second thought until a season later when she knew it was time to move on. She found the card again and took a chance and called. Since then, not only does she work with this agent, but she's living in LA, taking classes, cultivating relationships throughout the entertainment industry and is firmly establishing herself within the acting world.

Summer Brown (2004), Charis Haines (2004), Chelsea Retzlloff (2007) and Bartholomew Baptista (1995) are all ardent advocates of the benefits of participating in the summer festivals and other workshops such as the Bates Dance Festival, Jacob's Pillow, Ririe-Woodbury and the American College Dance Festival. Such events provide the opportunity to showcase your skills as well as train and meet with professionals from throughout the industry. Chelsea attended the American College Dance Festival where the competition she was in was judged by David Dorfman. Chelsea kept in touch with him after the festival and upon her arrival in NYC last summer she was asked to dance with his company at Lincoln Center in August. What an opportunity!

As Bartholomew prepared to move to NYC after a successful year with the Santa Barbara Dance Theater, he connected with an alum who was already living there. He left California with \$168, a duffle and a round trip ticket. He arrived in NYC on a Friday, the alum told him about two auditions that week-end, one with Paul Taylor and the other with Joy Kellman. By Sunday night Bartholomew was an official member of Joy Kellman's company.

For Charis, volunteering for the Lemonade Dance Company to conduct surveys at the Joyce Theater during their performances unlocked an untold number of doors. The first and most direct benefit was that the manager of the Joyce Theater walked up to her and hired her on the spot for assistant house manager. Her 4 ½ years working there facilitated her meeting many dancers and artistic directors which eventually led to her current position as a member of RIOULT.

Building rapport with the people and places you want to work has been a hallmark of Tracy Kofford's (1997) career so far and the benefits are real. Since leaving our hallowed walls, Tracy's performance career has included the Santa Barbara Dance Theater, Jody Oberfelder, apprenticing with Stephen Petronio, Mark Dendy, attending NYU for his MFA in Dance and fulfilling a long-term dream of becoming a member of Jennifer Muller The Works. Tracy is now a senior member of Jennifer Muller. Tracy's networking capabilities reach beyond the dance floor. Inspired by Christopher Pilafian, his first dance teacher at UCSB, Tracy decided that eventually teaching dance along with performance would be a part of his life. This opportunity presented itself when a former company member needed someone to substitute for the college dance class she was teaching. Tracy filled in for her and continued to do so laying the ground work for his own adjunct teaching position. Since that entrée into teaching he has taught for 3 ½ years at Adelphi University and is currently teaching at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

Aisha's transition from classically staged Shakespearean works to acting on sets in front of a camera, have proven far more challenging than she imagined. Landing in LA she also soon discovered improv was absolutely huge and she needed to learn how to do it. She started taking classes and ultimately ended up auditioning and being accepted into the Second City Conservatory. Her flexibility and willingness to continually hone her craft and acquire new skills is opening doors as each of these opportunities has offered the chance to meet people and network. *And* as each of these alumni has discovered, that's what this is all about if you want to have a successful and fulfilling career.

Like the other alumni, Janna Diamond (2007) is working diligently in NYC to hone her craft and has landed two positions – both full time – which enhance and support her dance as well as give her concrete management, interpersonal and other marketable business skills. She is currently the Manager of an independent mixed martial arts gym and along with being a member of the Doorknob Dance Company she is their manager handling marketing, bookings, and much, much more.

The juggling of multiple jobs, dance/acting positions, classes and auditions seems to be the way of life for our alumni for who dance and theater is their chosen path. You might think this would be enough to discourage someone completely, but when you speak with or meet these exceptional alumni you will understand and feel the passion that drives them to pursue these dreams. Chelsea Retzloff has taken on many things to make sure she can make it in NYC in pursuit of dance. She is currently working with the Hudson Vagabond Puppets, has a catering job, cleans studios in exchange for classes, is working with the Science House Foundation promoting science and the arts to young girls and tutors chemistry. Chelsea double majored in dance and chemistry while here at UCSB and it looks like all of her knowledge and skills are serving her well.

Zach Appelman's (2007) path is a little different than the others and has required an equally immense amount of commitment and determination. Zach was being encouraged to continue his education beyond UCSB and he was aiming for the best – Yale School of Drama. In preparation for this, Prof. Appel put him through his paces ensuring Zach would be fully prepared for whatever the admissions panel could throw at him during the audition. The three round audition process is extremely rigorous with the last call back being at Yale where it is a full day event with multiple auditions and mini-classes with faculty. The MFA in Acting is an extremely competitive program and of the 800+ applicants only 16 are chosen. In 2007, Zach and 2 other UCSB alumni made the cut and are currently completing this rigorous program looking forward to graduation in 2010.

A couple years prior to Zach's heading off to Yale, Christine Corpuz (2004) auditioned and was accepted into NYU's MFA in Acting program. Her diligence during her program served her well as she auditioned for and performed with Shakespeare in the Park (Central Park) immediately after completing her MFA. Christine's immediate success diminished quickly after the season closed. Despite her best efforts, no roles were forthcoming. Frustrated and discouraged Christine took bold action and started marketing her one-woman show, *I am Nothing Like My Mother*, which she had written as a capstone to her MFA at NYU, to small venues in NYC. Finally the Nuyorican Poets Café agreed to pick up her show for a 1 ½ month run. All of this was the result of Christine's sheer determination, perseverance and her unwavering passion for theater.

If the ears of the Theater and Dance Department faculty aren't ringing already, these many accomplishments of just these ten alumni speak volumes about the dance and theater program here at UCSB. The quality of the instruction, the opportunities and resources available to the students, accompanied by a nurturing environment where students can find and express their artistic voice is phenomenal. These alumni, every one of them, could not say enough good things about the faculty, their education, training, and overall preparation for their entrée into the very competitive world of theater and dance.

The networking, perseverance and raw determination have enabled all of these alumni to enjoy some hard-earned successes. Half of them have also had the good fortune of working with companies that tour both in the US and abroad. Bartholomew (MOMIX) and Charis (RIOULT) have toured in Europe, Tracy (Jennifer Muller)

and Chelsea (SB Dance Theater) toured in China and Emily Regas (1998) has performed at a number of French Festivals in Canada.

As each alumni told their story, I couldn't help but cheer them on as they conquered each trial and tribulation faced on the way to fulfilling their dreams. It became very clear that theater and dance careers are not for the faint of heart and their devotion to their craft is incredible and awe inspiring. They have all taken leaps of faith into the unknown, made tremendous sacrifices for their art, and invested all of themselves and more into their career. So, I caught myself wondering, what's next?

Bartholomew knew that he could not survive NYC on dance alone. After considering restaurant, retail and other work he turned to a temp agency which landed him at Verizon working in the marketing department. During the 3 years Bartholomew worked there he unexpectedly discovered that dance was not his only love. However, he did have to decide which got priority. Dance won out and fortunately he had an understanding supervisor who allowed him the flexibility to dance and temp. Bartholomew's dance career ended with an event not unlike the crashing of the markets last fall. He blew out his knee while on tour. All was not lost as his years in marketing piqued his curiosity to know more and he went back to get his MBA in Marketing and Media Communications. Since then he has worked with Lehman Brothers, Citigroup and is now a Senior Marketing Manager with American Express Corporate Cards Division.

Emily's networking and internship with the AT&T Foundation and 4 years of working with the Paul Taylor Dance Company in development and internship coordination positioned her well to obtain the job she currently holds. She is the Associate Director of National Advancement and Alumni Relations at the Juilliard School. She also continues to dance with the Metronome Rhythm Tap Ensemble and the Arch Studio – *A Path for Peace*.

When I asked, "what's next?" Aisha did not hold back: "Make it BIG!!" Aisha readily admitted the path to "big" is unclear, but she will continue to network, learn, grow and market her skills. I would suggest we keep an eye on the TV to see where she appears next.

For Summer, the winds of change are blowing her back from NYC to the west coast. She's been with the Digby Dance Company for 2 years now along with many other companies and views this as a time to get into teaching at the collegiate level. She has recently applied to CSU Long Beach for a MFA in Dance.

Charis, on the hand, isn't going anywhere. She has been dancing with RIOULT since Sept. 2007 and is very content to keep doing just that. Charis says that the pay, travel and health insurance certainly help too!

Chelsea is also quite happy to remain in NYC continuing to pursue her diversity of activities within both dance and science. She is also focusing her efforts on finding opportunities which may allow her to dance with David Dorfman, Lar Lubovitch or Company 14.

Also, happily making it in NYC, Tracy is currently working towards securing a tenure track university position, while continuing his choreography and performance work.

Christine has left NYC for the moment and is back out here in California evaluating her next step. Perhaps she and Aisha should get together.

Zach is still at Yale perfecting his acting skills and is considering a move to NYC after graduation. His current thoughts are to get into regional theaters in both Shakespearean and American Contemporary Theater.

These alumni are truly an inspiration to us all and we thank them for their honesty and candor as they shared their experiences and lessons learned with us. Each of us would be wise to take heed of their parting words of wisdom below, it is certainly sage advice:

1. Take full advantage of the faculty, staff, resources and opportunities available to you while at UCSB.
2. Be passionate about what you do and learn it well.
3. Network, Network, Network
4. Stay the course, don't give up – it won't be easy, but is anything worth anything in life ever easy?
5. Work hard, be committed and get out of your comfort zone!

Written by
Carolyn Curwen
Career Counselor – UCSB
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