



### Excerpt - PLACES

Places are called, and you stand ready in the wings. As the lights dim and your excitement and adrenaline increase, the audience's anticipation is palpable. Poised to enter the stage with all the training and rehearsals that led to this moment, you are prepared.

Passion is why we dance, and discipline is how we improve. Turning passion and discipline into a livelihood also requires preparation. How? With intention. Whether starting out or making a mid-career change, begin by taking center stage. Shift the focus from what you think will get you hired and, instead, clarify your unique artistic gifts, professional ambitions, and personal considerations. These three motifs become touchstones for determining and acquiring the skills necessary for choreographing your dance career.

Where are you right now? Perhaps you're weighing which school or company is the best for you or are considering the pros and cons of different career paths. Are you transitioning from a performer to a choreographer, company director, or studio manager and realize there is still much to learn? Maybe you're unsure where to begin or about what to do next. Possibly, you haven't fully committed to a dance career because you often hear, "You can't make a living in the arts." or "There is too much competition, and only one in a million makes it."

I have lived through many of these same issues and challenges. I researched options for my dance education, wrestled with my insecurities about failure, and overcame the objections of others. Once I committed to having a life in dance, I sought opportunities to perform and choreograph. I began in schools, community centers, outdoor fairs, and dance festivals, then on to theaters, small and large. I dealt with people in all the different roles involved with creating, producing, and promoting dance. It became necessary to understand what they did so I could communicate what I wanted effectively and efficiently. Additionally, I was often responsible for many of these jobs due to financial constraints.

My career has been very fulfilling but was rarely easy, and I was not always successful. At its best, it allowed me to collaborate with and learn from many gifted artists, nationally and internationally. But I hit walls of exhaustion, performed with injuries, received bad reviews, and lost opportunities due to economic downturns, marketplace preferences, and a global pandemic.

**I sought the information required for each opportunity and career shift.  
More than once, I had to acquaint myself with a new city and arts community,  
each with its own history, culture, and cliques.  
I did my best to adapt and create a work-life balance,  
often without the guidance, assistance, or support I needed.  
I want it to be easier for you.**

I have composed *Choreographing Your Dance Career* in four acts. These progressive sections build upon one another but can also be referenced individually. Here is a brief overview:

## **ACT 1 - FIRST STEPS: Defining What Matters**

Identifying your distinctive qualities, goals, and a life that suits your preferences sets the stage. This happens through self-reflection. The questions in this section will help you uncover descriptive language to use in the following Acts for promotional materials and when speaking about your work. An overview of different career paths and the necessary education and training for each is included. Strategies for maintaining good physical and mental health and developing a supportive network are essential for a sustainable career.

## **ACT 2 - PHRASING: Putting Yourself on the Page**

The different types of materials necessary for individual promotion and their use in traditional and online formats are explained with examples provided. The language and goals identified in Act 1 are used to write compelling biographies, resumes, and cover letters. Then, the focus shifts to visual pieces: headshots, action photos, and business cards. These accompany your written pieces to create a cohesive brand. Other supplemental materials such as video examples, an artist statement, and teaching philosophy are also covered.

## **ACT 3 - PARTNERING: Networking, Interviewing, and Auditioning**

Developing the ability to speak articulately about yourself, what you do, and your goals can make the difference between getting a job or not. This skill is as significant as the quality of your work or materials, as most opportunities involve an interview. Strategic networking and follow-up are essential tools for finding work and building community. Auditioning well is not easy, but preparing correctly can give you an advantage. When you get an offer, learn how to weigh the pros and cons before signing a contract. Once you have accepted a job, working cooperatively and understanding organizational policies is also part of the gig. The marketplace for all forms of dance is global. Identifying which locations have opportunities for the type of work that interests you can increase your chances of employment.

## **ACT 4 - BEHIND THE SCENES: Producing, Promoting, and Directing**

How performances are produced, funded, and marketed is essential information for everyone working in the performing arts. The fundamentals of arts administration, the business side of dance, include knowledge of for-profit and non-profit organizational structures and the roles of different personnel in the office and backstage. Good planning for implementing the artistic and technical aspects of a show will maximize the time and resources available. Budgets, contracts, grant writing, and funding sources keep any undertaking afloat, while the marketing of events and companies builds visibility and increases attendance. The demanding nature of a director's job and the importance of mentors are addressed.

## **CURTAIN**

Some parting thoughts to help you along your way.

*Now, let's begin!*



Artwork by Laura Higgins Palmer