

Outcome Report: Summer 2016 Mini Grant

Project: Preparation for Third-Year Arts Award at Bates Dance Festival

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To the Director of the Miller Arts Scholars, Professor Michael Rasbury,

Thanks to the generous funding of the Miller Arts Scholars and its sponsors, my desire to take preparatory dance and fitness classes during the summer became a reality.

The intention behind my original mini grant proposal was to seek monetary support in order to enroll and participate in dance and fitness classes throughout the summer preceding my attendance at the Bates Dance Festival, a three-week long retreat for dance with an emphasis on modern dance. The purpose of these classes was to prepare my body for the rigor of the Bates Dance Festival, during which I would dance at least six hours each day. Through ballet and other supplementary exercise classes aimed at the improvement of strength, balance, stamina, and flexibility, such as yoga and Pilates, I hoped to reawaken my body and sharpen my skills. I had used the previous academic year at the University of Virginia to explore dance through Improvisation and Composition, which challenged my creativity wonderfully as an artist and thinker, yet I had been unable to take technique classes to maintain my training as a skilled dancer. Thus, I certainly had a great deal of work cut out for me this summer.

Due to unanticipated scheduling complications with a summer course, my mini grant fund was allocated more heavily toward dance classes. However, this fortuitous shift in plans served me quite well. As fate would have it, I ended up taking ballet classes at the Richmond Ballet from Rebecca Hodal, who had spent the bulk of her career in the realm of modern dance. Consequently, she understood my interest as a modern dancer in learning ballet technique to enrich the quality of my dancing apart from classical training. Furthermore, she was able to diagnose many of my postural and alignment difficulties since she could surmise certain tendencies of mine through our shared dance background. This relationship proved to be extremely fruitful; I would often stay after class and ask questions on exercises I could practice at home to improve myself in specific areas, such as back flexibility and strength, foot articulation, and hip alignment in *passé* and *développé*, to name a few. Rebecca Hodal's wisdom and instruction were invaluable to my progress this summer.

The Richmond Ballet also offered classes in Rhythm & Motion, a California-based dance workout that was entirely foreign to me. I stumbled into my first class somewhat accidentally early in the summer when the ballet class I had intended to take had been canceled on short notice. Founded on the concept that "anyone can dance," Rhythm & Motion, taught by Paul Dandridge, proved to me that even a trained dancer can be bested by a dance exercise class; by the end of the hour-and-fifteen-minute long session, I was quite literally dizzy from intense, frantic physical exertion. My clothes were soaked through with sweat, and my face was an irreversible shade of red, but I *loved* it. I was instantly hooked, and Rhythm & Motion became a biweekly session of torturous ecstasy for me. From this class, my stamina grew immeasurably. I

credit Rhythm & Motion largely for boosting my physical endurance to the level required of me at the dance festival.

Although I invested most of the generous mini grant I received at the Richmond Ballet, I did also take other classes outside of that particular institution. Primarily, these were spent at the Opal Yoga studio in Charlottesville in hour-long sessions that focused on deep stretches, strength, and both inner and outer balance. These classes were at once physically demanding and incredibly calming, and I looked forward to the internal regeneration I experienced after each class. I believe my steady practice of yoga throughout the summer ultimately improved my “groundedness,” a word often used in modern dance to describe a dancer’s relationship to the floor. It is the ability by which he or she moves across it with weight while also maintaining their fluidity, stability, and grace. Yoga is a practice that is inherently related to the floor and to the earth. The time I spent on the mat deepened this relationship within me, for I noted a distinct change in the quality of my dancing after I had practiced yoga for a considerable time.

I would also like to address the fact that I was unfortunately unable to take classes through Posture Studio Pilates this summer, for several reasons. The classes turned out to be much more expensive than I anticipated, as I would have been required to buy a series of three private orientation classes at \$80 each before I could even purchase the monthly package detailed in my proposal. Due to this unpredicted increase in cost as well as multiple scheduling miscommunications that resulted from the studio’s transitioning locations, I deemed it more economical to spend the grant elsewhere. That being said, I did use all of the money that was so generously bestowed upon me, as I ended up spending more than predicted at the Richmond Ballet and in other studios. I am extremely satisfied with the products I have reaped from this summer of growth.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the Miller and Colbert families for their continued support of the arts at the University of Virginia through their dedication to the Miller Arts Scholars. Their profound generosity has enabled me to refine my dance technique and artistry in a way that otherwise would not have been possible. I look forward to continuing my journey as a dancer and as a member of the Miller Arts Scholars.

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