

ADELPHI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

catalyst

SPRING 2012

The rich threads
of legacy weave well
into the future...

Introducing the new Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences,
SAM L GROGG

raising the barre

By Ela Schwartz

Tradition and Evolution. The phrase couldn't be more fitting as the title chosen for the Dance Adelphi 2011–2012 season. Just as the year's performances feature both legacy works and world premieres, the Adelphi Department of Dance continues to draw on its history as one of the nation's first collegiate dance programs while embracing change on many levels.

MARTHA GRAHAM ONCE SAID that dance is a living art. It is essentially of the moment. And George Balanchine admonished his dancers to not hold back because now is all there is. At this moment, Adelphi's Department of Dance deserves the spotlight, because of its rich history. Over the past 70 years the Department of Dance has evolved to reflect the needs of its students—from founder Ruth St. Denis' vision of dance as spiritual expression to today's program that pushes students to become both accomplished dancers and critical

thinkers who are able to take on the challenges of whatever path they choose in life.

PAST

The Department of Dance was born in 1938 when Adelphi President Paul Dawson Eddy, an ordained minister, was inspired by Ruth St. Denis' vision of dance as a means of spirituality and drawing closer to God. Ms. St. Denis, a pioneer of modern dance, often referred to as the First Lady of American Dance, had performed around the world and established the Denishawn Dance Company

and the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts with her former husband, Ted Shawn. President Eddy contacted Ms. St. Denis regarding his idea for the nation's first dance department that would exist independently rather than under the umbrella of physical education. Ms. St. Denis took Mr. Eddy up on his offer. "Joy will be the keynote of all the teaching in the Department of Dance," she said.

While passionate about her new program, Ms. St. Denis was equally enthusiastic about her various other projects. Her thirst

for freedom and opportunities to expand the world of dance led to her departure in 1940; however, she maintained a relationship with Mr. Eddy and Adelphi for the rest of her life—performing, lending her name to events and ceremonies and attending the annual Ruth St. Denis Day, created in her honor. She received an honorary doctoral degree from Adelphi on June 12, 1963.

Ms. St. Denis was succeeded by an impressive array of dance luminaries, including Hanya

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Dance major Melissa Estes warms up at the barre in ballet class.

Holm, Jack Cole, Viola Farber, Yuriko, Juana de Laban, Nancy Topf and Rebecca Wright, who all performed or taught as visiting or full-time faculty. Bunty Kelley, a former dancer with Britain's Royal Ballet, Adelphi's first full-time ballet professor and wife of Harry Bernstein—then chair of the dance department—reminisced how she used to drive to the LIRR Nassau Boulevard train station to pick up Merce or Paul (legendary dancers and choreographers Merce Cunningham or Paul Taylor), bring them to campus and later to dinner at her and Mr. Bernstein's home in Garden City.

Through the years the department evolved with the times. Dancing as a form of spiritual transcendence made way for classes in theatrical dance. Dance notation classes were offered. Ballet became a requirement. Dance majors were required to complete academic credits toward a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. One thing that hasn't changed over the years is the passion of students and faculty for the art of dance.

PRESENT

It was the desire to share their love of dance with equally passionate students that brought today's faculty members, Department of Dance Chair Frank Augustyn and Assistant

Professors Catherine Denisot-Lawrence and Orion Duckstein, to the University.

Mr. Augustyn has achieved worldwide recognition as one of the finest ballet dancers in the world. Formerly a principal dancer with the National Ballet of Canada, he formed a legendary partnership with ballerina Karen Kain and performed as a guest artist with the Royal Ballet, the Bolshoi Ballet and the Kirov Ballet. He has also worked with choreographers from the worlds of both ballet and modern dance, including Rudolf Nureyev, Erik Bruhn, Frederick Ashton, Maurice Bejart and José

Limón. After leaving the stage Mr. Augustyn taught, wrote his memoir, produced a TV series and served as artistic director of the Ottawa Ballet.

After these successful endeavors, he found his heart was in working long-term with students to "get to know them and watch them develop to a professional level," he said, and "to work with students who shared my passion for dance."

Students need to have that passion to be accepted into Adelphi's dance program and meet its degree requirements. Mr. Augustyn explained that because companies

DANCING AT ADELPHI THROUGH THE YEARS



1938:

Adelphi President Paul Dawson Eddy recruits Ruth St. Denis to create a new dance department. She brings former Denishawn dancer, Jack Cole, to be a part of the dance faculty.



1943–1950:

Hanya Holm becomes chair. Known as one of the big four of modern dance (the others being Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman), Ms. Holm continues her association with the department until 1969.

1950–1952:

Juana de Laban, daughter of Rudolf von Laban—inventor of the Laban method of dance notation—succeed Ms. Holm as chair. Before she leaves due to a bout with polio, Ms. de Laban introduces the study of theory and analysis.

1953–1960:

Janey Price Goeb, new chair, initiates two huge changes for the department: the introduction of ballet, and the requirement that dance majors take academic courses outside of the Department of Dance.

1956–1972:

Harry Bernstein, who arrives at Adelphi in 1956, becomes chair and makes the curriculum more demanding, requiring an audition for acceptance to the program, four years of ballet classes and participation in summer workshops. Mr. Bernstein brings in renowned dancers including Viola Farber, Paul Taylor, Yuriko and Pearl Lang as adjunct faculty.



are performing more physically demanding choreography than ever, the department is requiring that applicants have a solid background in either modern dance or classical ballet, but preferably both. "These are the most difficult techniques. If you can master these, you are more valuable to a choreographer because you can then also handle jazz and other techniques," Mr. Augustyn said.

Prospective students undergo a three-and-a-half-hour audition process. Once accepted into the program, they are pushed to the heights of their abilities, taking daily dance classes—90 minutes

of ballet and 90 minutes of modern—and rehearsing well into the evenings and on weekends.

The challenging curriculum is apparently resonating with both current and prospective students; the department is receiving more inquiries from out-of-state residents from as far off as Los Angeles and Hawaii, and recently admitted students from Poland, Greece and Malaysia. More men are also being attracted to the program, a trend that is very encouraging to the department's newest addition, Professor Orion Duckstein.

Until two years ago, Mr. Duckstein, who joined the faculty

here in 2012, was a dancer with the Paul Taylor Dance Company, and regularly taught master classes throughout the United States. The expertise he brings from the Taylor company adds yet another dimension to the Adelphi students' experience and training. He has been very engaged in choreographing both for student performances and professionally. In addition to classes and performing, dance majors must

also complete a solid academic courseload. "There are company directors who are looking for dancers who can bring other

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1972–1995:

In the U.S., ballet, modern and other dance forms rise to new heights in popularity. Students interested in a professional dancing career demand a broader curriculum that includes jazz and musical theatre dance, and Adelphi hires Norman Walker to reorganize the curriculum. Theatre and dance merge into one performing arts department.

1995–2000:

Carmen de Lavallade, who previously danced with Lester Horton and Alvin Ailey, becomes chair. She is succeeded by Rebecca Wright, formerly with American Ballet Theatre and the Joffrey Ballet.

2000:

Frank Augustyn joins as director and is appointed department chair in 2007.

2008:

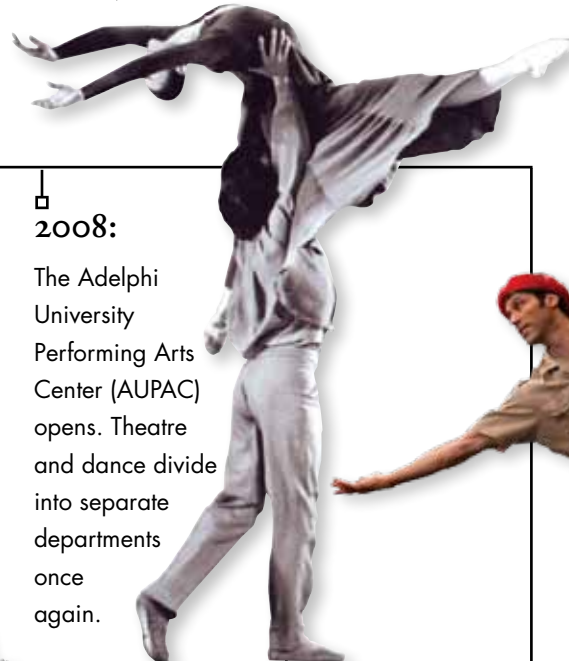
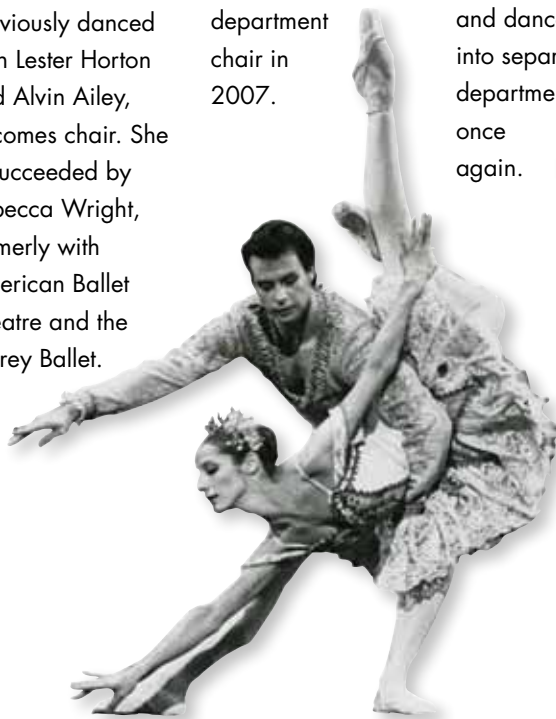
The Adelphi University Performing Arts Center (AUPAC) opens. Theatre and dance divide into separate departments once again.

2009:

Catherine Denisot-Lawrence, a Parisian who formerly danced with Pina Bausch and the Netherlands Dance Theatre, among other companies, is appointed assistant professor.

2011:

After performing for 11 years with the Paul Taylor Dance Company, Orion Duckstein joins the department as an assistant professor.



qualities aside from technique, such as critical thinking skills and the ability to write well, communicate and think rationally,” Mr. Augustyn said. For students who live, eat and breathe dance, around the clock, the importance of a well-rounded education cannot be underrated. Mr. Duckstein summed it up bluntly. “If you were an idiot, Paul (Taylor) didn’t want to work with you,” he said.

Students aren’t the only ones pushing themselves to their limits; faculty aren’t resting on their laurels either. They continue to recruit compelling choreographers to work with students.

Professor Catherine Denisot-Lawrence, a Parisian, was trained in Europe and danced with several companies, including Pina Bausch and the Netherlands Dance Theatre. An innovative and much-loved teacher, she regularly seeks to hone her instructional techniques. She recently became

certified in Zena Rommett Floor-Barre Technique, completed the ABT teacher certification and is currently taking a refresher class in Martha Graham technique.

Ms. Denisot-Lawrence said that most students enter the program with their sights set on performing with a modern dance company, but some go on to dance on Broadway,

as nursing or physical therapy—careers their academic studies have prepared them to pursue.

SHAPING THE FUTURE

Hard work isn’t all there is to the Department of Dance. In this close-knit department, faculty work closely with the dancers, giving them extra help and practice time. Both sophomore Sasha Smith and junior Alexandra Doyscher agree. “I work in the dance department

McKeely Borger, were both recruited at a dance competition by Mr. Augustyn. Sasha and Alex have studied with renowned guest faculty and choreographers, such as Amy Marshall, Christopher Fleming (*Tommy*) and Jacques Cebron (*Carmina Burana*). While both students ultimately want to perform with a modern dance company, they also see the importance of their academics. “I really enjoy learning and want to keep my options open,”

Alex said, adding that she is considering attending law school in the future. For now, both students enjoy this exciting time

in the department’s history when more people are discovering this hidden gem, as Alex described Adelphi. “It’s fun to be here as things are really starting to pick up,” she said.

Despite all the changes the department has undergone, it looks as though joy being the keynote, as Ms. St. Denis put it, has remained a constant theme.



The legendary Martha Graham teaching proper technique in an Adelphi dance class.

Faculty member Amy Marshall teaches partnering to dance majors Kenneth Murray, Nicholas Bartolotti and Lawrence Bright.



in musical theatre or even at Radio City as Rockettes. Others decide to teach, choreograph, move into costume or lighting design or even leave the performing arts altogether, perhaps using their knowledge of how the human body works to go into such fields

and see students coming in and out to talk with professors,” Sasha said. “If students express an interest in interning with a company, the faculty will work to try and make it happen.”

Both Sasha and Alex have traveled some distance to study at Adelphi: Sasha from Syracuse and Alex from Saskatchewan, Canada. Alex and her roommate, sophomore



EDIFICE OF THE ARTS

Dance at Adelphi, yesterday and today, can be illustrated by two buildings, one a dream and the other very real. During Ruth St. Denis' years at Adelphi, she saw dance as a means to achieve spiritual and religious transcendence and her lifelong dream was to build a temple to engage in her spiritual practice. However, in 1938, with the country in the midst of the Great Depression, it was difficult for Ms. St. Denis to secure funding for her Temple of Dance, and throughout her life, she tirelessly pursued its construction, to no avail.

Fast forward to 2006, when Adelphi began planning its new state-of-the-art Performing Arts Center (AUPAC) to house the departments of theatre, music and dance. Frank Augustyn, chair, collaborated with the architect to make the space work for the dancers' physical and emotional well-being. Before its recent renovations, Woodruff Hall served as the

Department of Dance's former headquarters, and the building had erratic heat, few bathrooms, no air-conditioning nor the sprung floors that make it easier on dancers' joints when they land their jumps, Mr. Augustyn explained. For the AUPAC, he requested sprung floors, natural and incandescent lighting to emotionally brighten the space and lockers and showers to allow the dancers to stash their gear and clean up after a strenuous rehearsal or performance.

"I asked for external and internal windows," he said. "External to let in the light and internal so that the people within the building can see the dancers."

The result is a major draw to performers, students and audience members alike. Ruth St. Denis would probably approve.