

Dancing in the UK and Europe

January – June 2012



Emma Jarman

After receiving a phone call that I had been awarded a scholarship which would lead to the most prestigious and life-changing experience of my life, I spent months and months preparing; organizing my trip to the UK under the BBM Youth Support Scholarship for Ballet. I was awarded the scholarship in 2010, but after much deliberation with my family and the BBM Organisation, I decided to take up the scholarship in 2012 - after I had completed my HSC school education, and also after my 18th birthday - so I was eligible for the essential Tier 4 Youth Mobility Visa to the UK (allowing me to both work and study full time for up to two years). This visa was absolutely necessary for me, as I had contacted various schools, colleges and companies applying to attend for a period of time, but I also needed to work in the UK to sustain myself there.

I began at the BBM office in Wynyard. I contacted previous awardees and read their reports, understanding the important lessons they had learnt and what they enjoyed the most. I concluded that most people did not travel alone - or if they did they were met by someone or had a home organized for when they arrived – and that many had chosen particular times to go; i.e. during the audition season, the competition period, and for various workshops and holidays schools. Unfortunately I had no contacts in England, nor had I anyone to travel with me, so the host family option sounded the most appealing. Fortunately, my older sister had travelled to England to work, a few years previously, and still kept in contact with a lady she had roomed with for the majority of her time: her name was Joan; she lived in Oxford, and became my second mum as time wore on.



Joan's house, Oxford

For many months before I left, 'Google' was my best friend. I researched everything I found associated with dance in the UK, and emailed them in pleading my story to ask if I could observe or even take part in their classes. I learned that London was where I wanted to be centred (it is the key area for dance in the UK), and that I wanted to travel up to Scotland and even parts of Europe. Most places I had emailed were not very helpful and some didn't even reply, but others were extremely supportive and sent me details about their auditions, courses and dates in which I could visit. Unfortunately, as I learned when I arrived in the UK, many places who had said I was welcome to visit turned out to be too busy or could somehow not accommodate me anymore. So while I was there I constantly checked forums, researched, and emailed colleges as I found out about them - by word of mouth or at the dance expo 'Move It!' I attended in February.

I participated in many auditions around London when I first arrived in mid-January (the first round of auditions for the year), including London Studio Centre and the Urdang Academy – both of whom I had contacted earlier – and I attended public classes at Pineapple Dance Studios, The Place, and Studio 68. I lived in Oxford (north east of London; 1 hour by train and 2 hours by bus) and travelled into London almost every second day for classes, auditions and to schools to organize when I could visit. I mainly took classes at Pineapple Dance Studios as it was easy to get to by the Underground and they had over 50 classes a day in so many different levels and styles. In casual classes and even at auditions, I met many people from all around the world and even made a few great friends I hope to see again one day! Many people were



Pineapple Dance Studios, London

doing the same thing as I; travelling to London to audition for colleges from various places around the globe, and this made it easier for me to make friends and learn more about dance and London.

Oxford was a good base for me to leave my luggage and learn the ins and outs of London before attempting it, and if I needed to stay in London I found a cheap hostel for a night or two! Conveniently, in the Oxfordshire, I worked with a disabled persons' contemporary company called Anjali Dance Company. I acted as a volunteer assistant teacher for a few weeks which was an amazing experience and a great start to working in the UK. Although, as time wore on I decided that the commute into London was too great and that I would need to find a place to stay in London if I was to work and attend a full time school there. Finding a job in London was incredibly hard - as the population is so great and the unemployment rate extremely high – and after applying for jobs for over a month, I finally decided to become a Zumba teacher. I knew I was assured a job in this industry as it is extremely popular in dance schools, gyms and community centres around the world, and the first-occurring course was up in Scotland, so it even gave me an excuse to travel. I ended up working for the London City Council for Sport as a cover teacher and I had a permanent one class a week at the Harbour Club Gym in Notting Hill. Altogether, I taught about 4 classes a week, and at 25 pounds a class my income wasn't great, but it was at least something that kept me fit, was part time, and helped with the rent!



Anjali Dance Company, Oxfordshire



Notting Hill Gate Underground, London



Miss Beckley, Ballet teacher at Urdang Academy, London

In mid-February, my boyfriend joined me for a couple months to travel and work also. After he arrived we rented a small flat in Notting Hill, for 280 pounds a week (which is quite cheap for London!), and I began attending the Urdang Academy full-time with the second year students completely free of charge! Thankfully I had created a good relationship with the director of the college and had kept in contact with her since I had first received the scholarship - and finally met her when I auditioned for the school moved into London - so we were able to organize that I could take classes with the students for 2 months. The Urdang Academy is a full-time musical theatre college with a variety of courses, such as the 3-year musical theatre diploma, 3-year dance diploma, 1-year foundation course and 3-year degree course (certified by Trinity College). I was involved in the

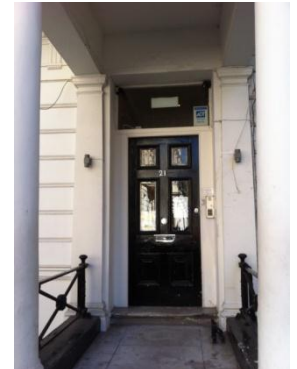
2nd year stream of the 3-year dance diploma course, and we took classes from 8am-6pm Monday to Friday in Ballet, Contemporary, Musical Theatre, Jazz, Street, Singing, Drama and Acrobatics. Some classes I was unable to attend because the students had assessments or projects, but I normally took 2-5 classes a day. The standard of the dancers was extremely high, and the teachers they had were heavily involved in dance around London (e.g. shows, companies, and some were even renowned choreographers). Being in the centre of London,



2nd year Dance stream students, London

Urdang had its own agents for the dancers and auditions were held at the college regularly for shows, tours and even performances such as the Brit awards. Everyone at the college was extremely welcoming and friendly to me, and made me feel quite at home and even helped me in everyday living in London, such as cheap places to eat, places to dance and even places to work.

Living in Notting Hill was extremely convenient for travelling Urdang to every day. Notting Hill is in West London (close to where the Australian community lives), and while it is in Zone 1 of 10 zones of London, travelling to the other side of Zone 1, to Urdang, took me almost an hour! However, while in London I couldn't resist seeing some shows! Leicester Square is full of ticket booths for musicals and theatre productions which showed daily, and theatres were all over London – one was even very close to Urdang; 'Sadler's Wells' (the main base for contemporary companies such as Matthew Bourne and Hofesh Shetchner). It was hard affording rent, everyday living expenses and food, but I went to see some shows when I had



Our apartment in Notting Hill, London

extra money, and even acquired a few free tickets from Urdang when the students went to see a production. A highlight for me was seeing a triple bill which involved Matthew Bourne's Company (later in my trip I even met a lady in the Company!), and Hofesh Shetchner's Company. Luckily, in May I was able to see Hofesh Shetchner up close when I did an open audition for an apprentice position within the company, but I was unsuccessful. Just doing that audition really gave me an insight into just how many dancers there are in London all wanting the same positions! There was only the one job and there was over 500 dancers auditioning that day. Luckily, auditions are quite frequent in London and there is plenty of work around.



Sadler's Wells Theatre, London

My time at Urdang was great training for me as a dancer and a great experience as I had never been full-time anywhere before, and it was interesting to see how full-time training was run in the UK. The Urdang Academy was one of the most prestigious dance schools in London, alongside London Studio Centre and the Central School of Ballet. However, both LSC and the Central were some of the schools that promised I could visit but then were unable to take me in. Some other schools I visited around the UK such as Stella Mann College (Bedford) and Sage Academy (Newcastle) were at quite a lower standard and it was quite disappointing to see aspiring dancers being trained at this level. I quickly concluded that London is definitely the centre for dance in the UK. However, with so many dance and musical theatre schools within the city, the standard is far lower compared to Sydney and most of Australia where there are fewer schools, which keeps standards higher! Although, I visited the Northern Ballet School (Manchester), for only a day, there the dancers were trained at a level even higher than London: more equivalent to Australia! The college was only small with less than 50 dancers in each year, and there was a strong emphasis on technique with a classical basis. The students were also a lot more supportive of each other at the NBS, and had a good relationship with the teachers who advised them and helped them to move into jobs and pursue their career. The NBS also had auditions every week



Stella Mann College, Bedford



Sage Academy, Newcastle

in their 3rd year, allowing the students to begin their career even before they had graduated (if they were successful, which many were!). Here the teachers were great help in advising the students of what jobs to take and whether they should leave the college to work or stay on and finish the diploma.



Northern Ballet School, Manchester

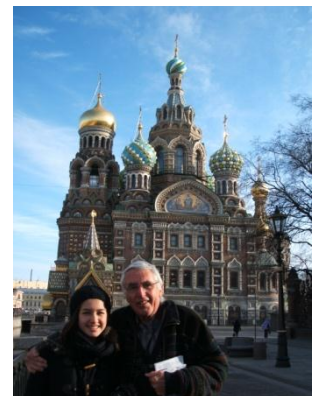
Of all the schools and colleges I visited in the UK, the Northern Ballet School was by far my favourite, as the students were not only well trained and went on to good jobs and careers, but they were happy and loved what they did! Originally I left Australia hoping to audition for some colleges and attend one beginning in September (the start of the UK year), however obstacles such as fees came up and soon dissuaded me from this. DADA (Dance and Drama Awards) Scholarships, student loans and government funding could only be awarded to UK citizens; my work and study visa was an issue as it was only 2 years and the courses were mainly 3 years, so I would have to return home and apply for another visa halfway through the course as in the conditions of my visa it could not be cancelled or extended; also, I decided that I would much prefer to train at home where the standard is much higher to begin with, and even though there is not much work in Australia, the dance community is smaller and much more welcoming! So my dream would be to later return to the UK after I have properly trained, and work there in London with the many companies and shows that are both permanent and tour regularly.

However, my experiences did not stop at England. After I finished two months at the Urdang Academy and left our flat in London, I met up with my parents in Europe and travelled with them to



Memorial plaque outside Anna Pavlova's house, St Petersburg

St Petersburg, Russia. They had happily used my scholarship as an excuse to travel themselves, and I thought with them it would be great to travel to where Ballet was born! Russia was cold and miserable, and unfortunately we arrived in the Easter weekend and many shows were closed for the week. However, aside from sightseeing and enjoying the Russian culture, I visited the many theatres in St Petersburg, the old house of Anna Pavlova, and finally attended Swan Lake by the St Petersburg Ballet Theatre School. It was great for me to



Dad and I, St Petersburg

experience the training in Russia now, as the dancers were about 16 years old and all ready to perform in companies. I definitely wish I could have stayed longer in Russia and learnt more, but my next stop was Germany!

I left my parents and went to Germany by myself where I stayed in Berlin for about a week. With only a short amount of time, I quickly finished most of my sightseeing in the first couple of days and got straight into dancing. I first spent a day with the Berlin State Ballet School. This school was a "high school" as we know it, but much more like the Australian Ballet School where the students dance most of the day and complete their education classes in the afternoon, with the school leading straight into the Berlin State Ballet Company. There were students from the age of 13 to 18, and I took a morning Ballet class with the 17 and 18 year olds (I had contacted them earlier). It was definitely an experience dancing



Berlin State Ballet School, Berlin

there, as the dancer's technique was absolutely faultless: they had perfect turn out, amazing leg extension and a beautiful presence. However, some were a little too thin or their legs were far too turned out, but they all aspired to be perfect and were very close! I then watched their rehearsal for their upcoming performance. There was not one dancer out of line, one foot not in position, one finger not perfectly placed. The choreography was also gorgeous, and all the dancers were en pointe. This school was definitely one of the best in Berlin and the best I had seen – almost all the dancers were ready to perform in companies.



Center of Dance, Berlin

In my remaining time in Berlin, I researched places for casual classes and travelled around the city dancing wherever I could. I took “profitraining” classes at many centres, including the Dance Studio Berlin and the Berlin Dance Centre. It was surprising to see how many professional dancers took these classes and were of such a high standard. I benefitted a lot from these classes: one of the teachers was in the Berlin State Ballet Company and really focussed on technique, while another was temporarily living in Germany, from China and had trained at the London Studio Centre in the UK.



Semperoper House, Dresden

I also travelled to Dresden where I spent a couple of nights and visited the Semperoper Ballet Company. I had also contacted them earlier, and they were very welcoming. I took morning classes with them while I was there and watched their rehearsals in the afternoon. They had a guest teacher at the time from America, so it was great to have no issue with a language barrier, and most of the dancers were actually from around the world anyway; so in Germany I did not have any issues with languages (only at the Berlin State Ballet School did they not speak English, although luckily Ballet terminology/French is all the same across the globe). The company dancers were just divine: their technique was immaculate and they were so emotive. It was definitely an honour to have been able to work so closely with the company, and I even attended their performance of Coppelia on my final day in Dresden (sitting with the choreographers), which was just amazing – the company, in residency at the Semperoper House, was the definitely the best thing in Dresden!



Principals of the Semperoper Ballett, Dresden



Louis Cruises Dancers

After touring Germany by myself, I flew to Italy to meet up with my boyfriend and his family who (having also taken advantage of the fact that he was travelling) had spent the last few weeks sightseeing in France. I had a great time touring Italy and not travelling alone anymore, and after his family flew home, we went on to Greece where we enjoyed a short cruise around the Greek Islands. This was a great relaxing holiday after the dance inspired trip around Europe we had just had, but I didn't stop emailing colleges for when we went back to England and applying for other jobs. We also watched the cruise

dancers perform every night and I even spoke to the cruise director who gave me a few pointers on applying for cruise dance jobs.

Travelling around not only Germany, but Europe, was second nature to me (coming from a backpacker family), but I definitely recommend it and how easy it is to travel from the UK!

Sometimes flights can be quite reasonable from the UK to Europe, however if you don't mind a rough trip, some bus companies go from London to Paris for only 50p! I took advantage of this and when I arrived back from Europe I took an overnight bus up to Scotland where I met up with a friend and danced at Dancebase in Edinburgh. They had a professional ballet morning class, however they were nowhere near the standard of Germany. The teacher was great but the dancers were not at a professional level... but the experience of finding this out was invaluable!



Dancebase, Edinburgh

Back in England my boyfriend flew back home and I continued to take classes at Pineapple, and teach my Zumba classes, but I commuted from Oxford again. My money was running low at this time, so I often had to sacrifice some colleges I was to visit, just because they were charging a fee for me to join in classes and they were expensive to travel to. By an incredible coincidence, I met with a lady called Victoria who taught at the Royal Ballet School and was the Director of the London Children's Ballet Company. We talked a lot about my scholarship and what I was doing in the UK, and she was very interested as she had a very close friend back in Australia (Sarah Boulter). Victoria was a lovely person and tried to help me as much as she could; she organized for me to meet with a lady from Matthew Bourne's contemporary Company, and also a lady who was a freelance dancer and teacher around London. Not only did she help me create a network of dancers in London, but she also gave me temporary work with the London Children's Ballet as an assistant teacher/demonstrator!



*London Children's Ballet,
London*

However, as time passed I could not afford to work for a lot less money than I was living on, and I had to fly home. Though, this was not a loss. I had successfully experienced dance not only in the UK and Europe, I had also created a network for myself in London I am able to come back to. I could not have asked for a better 5 months overseas and thank the BBM for allowing me to travel and pursue my career and have the most amazing experience of my life!

Thanks to BBM, I am now currently studying full-time at Sarah Boulter's 'Ev and Bow' dance school in Kirawee: I would not be here without having been to England, so thank you BBM!

Emma Jarman, 10/07/12

Appendix:

Pineapple Dance Studios

Studio 68

Urdang Academy

London Studio Centre

Central School of Ballet

Stella Mann College

Northern School of Ballet

Sage Academy

Berlin State Ballet School

Centre of Dance Berlin

Berlin Dance Centre

Semperoper Ballett

www.balletcompanies.com

www.timeout.com

www.moveitdance.co.uk

www.londondance.com

www.gumtree.co.uk