

BBM Awards report- ballet

I left Australia on April 8th 2009, and arrived in London during the Easter weekend. From the very beginning, my adventure brought constant amazement at the rich cultural scene in the United Kingdom.

My first event was training at the Royal Opera House with Steven McRae, principal dancer with The Royal Ballet. It was a spectacular opening to the trip and fantastic to witness the heights reached by a former BBM Award recipient. Steven kindly gave his spare time to rehearse with me a classical variation and contemporary solo, and over the period of about one week I was able to take a rare look behind the scenes at one of Europe's (and indeed the world's) most esteemed companies.

One of the productions The Royal Ballet was staging at that time was "Giselle", a romantic ballet first presented in 1841 and indispensable in the history of classical ballet. The performance that I watched featured Roberta Marquez in the title role. She gave a most dramatic and multi-dimensional interpretation, juxtaposing Giselle's journey from artlessness to heartbreak and insanity, while maintaining the superhuman effortlessness to which every dancer aspires.

For three days I attended the fulltime ballet course at Central School of Ballet, which incorporated daily ballet class (girls and boys separated), pointe class, pas de deux, contemporary, and jazz. On the second day I was invited to take part in a workshop with Daniel de Andrade, ballet master of Northern Ballet Theatre (which resides in Leeds). He began choreographing a piece to be used for NBT in the future, and it was interesting to see how he manipulated sections of movement to convey his concept. Although a lengthy process, it is an honour for any dancer to have a work created on them, and an essential part of the vocation. At the conclusion of my visit to the school, I met with outgoing director Bruce Samson and incoming director Sara Matthews who had observed my dancing in class. They offered me a position in the third (and final) year of the course, however expressed that they were unable to offer financial assistance unless I have a relative who currently resides in Britain. Due to the exorbitant fees and cost of living in London, this was not a viable option, however I thoroughly enjoyed the training at the school.

I also attended classes at the English National Ballet School, with the second and third year girls. This course mainly consisted of open classical class followed by pointe class. It was encouraging to perceive that the standard of training in Australia is indeed competitive and respected on an international stage, and furthermore that the Australian work ethic is a highly valued attribute.

Throughout my stay in London I took daily ballet open classes, including at the world famous Pineapple Studios in Covent Garden. While open classes in Australia are few, Pineapple runs classes all day, seven days a week, in all styles and all levels. It was an excellent opportunity to sample the variety of teaching methods available globally and

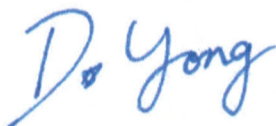
dance alongside professionals from numerous European companies. My teachers included Denzil Bailey (English National Ballet), Roland Price (Royal Ballet), Ian Knowles (Royal Ballet, London City Ballet), and Joan Hewson (John Cranko School in Stuttgart and London School of Contemporary Dance), whose teaching is based on the principles of the Cecchetti method.

Operating in a similar structure to Pineapple, DanceWorks is another popular studio that I visited. I especially enjoyed the classes of Zina Mamedova, who danced with the Kirov Ballet, Moscow Classical Ballet and the National Theatre Ballet of Prague. The Russian technique is not predominant in Australia despite being internationally appreciated, so the composition and methodology of the class proved challenging, yet rewarding. It presents a different approach to the classical ballet repertoire (compared to Western teaching) and I found it most beneficial.

I was fortunate enough to be able to take class with the English National Ballet company- a wonderful finale for the trip. This really was a privilege, as out of the several hundred applicants per year, only around one third are given the opportunity to attend classes. As well as observing company rehearsals, I was able to meet with Artistic Director Wayne Eagling who gave me lots of useful feedback and opened up a possibility of future employment. In addition, I gained a detailed insight into life as a professional ballet dancer- the life that I hope to lead.

Since coming back to Australia, I have been able to continue my ballet training with newfound knowledge and respect for the art. From the smallest technical detail to the broadest artistic advice, my trip has enlightened me in so many ways and allowed me to grow not only as a dancer but also as a person. Through teaching and choreography I have been able to pass on some of the knowledge and perspectives gained abroad, and I will continue to do so into the future. The diversity of teachers and performers that I encountered brought with it a wealth of new information, motivation and inspiration, further concretizing my ambitions to pursue dance professionally.

I am ever so grateful to BBM for giving me this opportunity to follow my dreams- one which I would not otherwise have had, yet which has been invaluable. It was an honour to represent Australia and I hope that young dancers in the future will have the opportunity to experience the United Kingdom, with the wealth of history and culture that it offers.



Dominique Yong
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