



THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by – LISA PAVANE – 2012 Churchill Fellow

THE STUART AND NORMA LESLIE CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

to advance the Arts in Australia

by closely observing internationally recognized vocational dance training institutions.

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Signed Lisa Pavane

Dated 1 July 2013

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INTRODUCTION

My fellowship to advance the Arts in Australia provided the possibility to closely observe internationally recognized vocational dance training institutions in the United States of America. Through the organisations I visited and the sharing of knowledge with like-minded professionals, the fellowship afforded me the opportunity to gain experience in leading and informing the future of elite vocational dance training in Australia.

The main purpose and focus of my fellowship was to view similar elite dance training organisations and those in particular that offer residential facilities for their students.

It is my intention through this report, to share my experience and knowledge gained, for the ongoing development, training and health and welfare of young dancers. I believe the knowledge I garnered will ultimately contribute to the social, personal and intellectual development of dance students in Australia, which will in turn contribute to the future of dance as an art form in this country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to the sponsorship I received from Norma Leslie, in the memory of the late Stuart Leslie. I feel so very privileged to have been awarded this Sponsored Fellowship for performance excellence in the arts. Mr Leslie was a great supporter of The Australian Ballet (TAB) and in particular, The Australian Ballet School (ABS). I look forward to sharing this report with Norma and to our ongoing association and love of ballet.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Board of Directors of The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust who give of their time voluntarily, in administering the funds initially raised by the Australian fundraising appeal in 1965 and the annual Churchill Fellowship award scheme.

I would like to thank Marilyn Rowe OBE (Director, ABS) and the Board of Directors of the ABS for their support, and in permitting me the time to undertake the fellowship.

Finally, a special thanks to the individuals who so generously gave of their time, allowing me to visit their organisations and for sharing ideas and experiences.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project	To advance the Arts in Australia by closely observing internationally recognized vocational dance training institutions.

Fellowship highlights

- Observing classes at three elite classical ballet training organisations – San Francisco Ballet School, Houston Ballet Academy and The School of American Ballet;
- Touring the residential facilities of the above organisations and discussions with Residence Directors and Resident Assistants;
- Meetings with Patrick Armand (Associate Director, San Francisco Ballet School), Shelly Power (Academy Director, Houston Ballet Academy) and Stanton Welch (Artistic Director, Houston Ballet) discussing training programs, residential facilities, student services and welfare and future networking opportunities;
- Networking with current directors of elite international ballet schools and ballet companies at the Youth America Grand Prix in New York;
- Observing the teaching and meeting with a teacher who has extensive knowledge in the Vaganova training syllabus; and
- Development of future exchange/collaboration opportunities: San Francisco Ballet School, Houston Ballet and Joffrey Ballet Academy.

Major conclusions

- The ABS is amongst the top international training organisations; to stay at the forefront the ABS must continue to review its training programme ensuring it delivers world's best practice in classical ballet training and pedagogy;
- A sequential training programme, best delivered full-time over eight years, will ensure a strong, uniform technique is developed, producing dancers with appropriate technical skill, stamina and self-discipline achievable by graduation; and
- The current lack of residential accommodation for interstate and international students who come to Melbourne to join the ABS's full-time programme is inadequate. For students from Australia and abroad to realise their full potential, it is imperative that the ABS secures residential facilities as soon as possible.

Dissemination of Information

Opportunities available for sharing information arising from this fellowship will be through educative and personal communication with fellow colleagues and teachers at the ABS. Dance specific media opportunities for written contributions in Australian dance publications will provide avenues for disseminating to the broader Australian dance community.

PROGRAMME

San Francisco

San Francisco Ballet School (SFBS)

Patrick Armand - Associate Director, SFBS

Christina Gray Rutter - Student Services Coordinator and Registrar, SFBS

Los Angeles

Masterpiece Dance Theatre

Nadezhda Kalmanovskaya - Ballet Mistress and founder, Vaganova teacher

Houston

Houston Ballet Company (HB) and Houston Ballet Academy (Academy)

Stanton Welch - Artistic Director, HB

Shelly Power- Academy Director, HB Academy

New York

The School of American Ballet (SAB)

Kay Mazzo - Director, SAB

Sion Harrington - Director of Residence Life, SAB

Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH)

Endalyn Taylor - Director, Dance Theatre of Harlem School (DTHS)

Francis Lawrence - Dancer, DTH and former ABS student

American Ballet Theatre's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School (ABT JKO) and ABT Training Curriculum

Franco De Vita - Principal, ABT JKO

Raymond Lukens - Director, ABT National Training Curriculum

Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP)

Deborah Hess – Canada's National Ballet School

Jay Jolley – Assistant Director, The Royal Ballet School

Alexis Kremnev – Academy Artistic Director, Joffrey Ballet

André Lewis – Artistic Director, Canada's Royal Winnipeg Ballet

Oliver Matz – Tanz Academie Zurich

Garry Trinder – Director, New Zealand School of Dance

MAIN BODY

The ABS recognizes that great companies are married to great schools and as the national centre of excellence in classical dance training and the school of TAB, it is essential that the ABS continues to remain competitive on a national and international level.

My fellowship, to closely observe elite vocational dance schools in the United States of America, provided me with an opportunity to compare and learn strategies in the pursuit of the ABS in continuing to provide dancers with the highest level of training, ultimately contributing to the future of dance as an art form in Australia. The organisations I chose to visit all have residential facilities for students and, as this is a vital mission of the ABS in securing support and funding to achieve a residence for ABS students, this was paramount to the journey.

My fellowship incorporated visits to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston and New York. I was able to meet with Directors from San Francisco Ballet School, Houston Ballet Academy, The School of American Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem School and American Ballet Theatre's National Training Program, concluding with my attendance at the Youth American Grand Prix competition. Los Angeles provided an opportunity to meet and observe an experienced teacher who has extensive knowledge in the Vaganova syllabus and training programme.

San Francisco

San Francisco Ballet School

The first choice for my fellowship was to spend time with Patrick Armand, Associate Director of San Francisco Ballet School (SFBS). Patrick has been associated with the Trainee Program at SFBS for the past few years, before gaining leadership of the School in September 2012. It was with much excitement that I looked forward to spending time with him, sharing ideas and experiences and to observe student classes. I was keen to learn about the SFBS's training programme, its residential facilities and the health and welfare services in place for its students.

Currently, SFBS has approximately 400 students, largely populated through the after school programme. Introducing ballet to a younger generation from the age of 4, pre-ballet classes are filled on a first come first served basis, with students attending once a week. Students wishing to enter the SFBS's eight year-level training programme may audition for Level 1 when age eligible. Students in Levels 1 - 3 take classes two or three times per week with students from Level 4 onwards attend Monday through Friday.

The SFBS curriculum is similar to, though not as comprehensive as, the ABS's curriculum and includes classes in technique, pointe work, pas de deux, men's technique, character dance and music. An opportunity for further training is available for selected students from the uppermost

level of the School, along with other students chosen from SFBS's annual Summer Programme or through international dance competitions. This small and select group who join the SFBS's Trainee Program and are fully funded and receive a monthly subsidy, as well as, accommodation in the SFBS residence. Trainees in this programme take part in similar pre-professional opportunities that the ABS Level 8 Graduate year students receive, when participating in TAB's Dancers Company regional tour. These two similar programmes afford essential experience to students by providing opportunities to perform classical and contemporary repertoire and works especially created and staged for them, whilst continuing to improve technical proficiency. This experience is invaluable when transitioning from student to professional.

Like the ABS, the staffing of SFBS is relatively small including Patrick Armand as Associate Director, seven teachers and occasional guest instructors from SFB, six administrative staff and six musicians. Patrick teaches and rehearses the trainee students on a daily basis and his teaching stems from his own dance training in France. His teaching proficiency and knowledge is world class and this was evident in the trainee students as the standard was high.

I was able to view many age group classes from the youngest through to the Trainee Program. My observations from the range I saw indicated promising intermediate and advanced levels with students from Levels 5 through to trainee particularly highly developed in areas including pointe work, batterie and allegro. I was interested to study the female students who seemed more accustomed to working in pointe shoes and showing stability, strength and articulation, compared to students at the ABS.

San Francisco Ballet's Chris Hellman Center for Dance is a large multi-storey building in the heart of the theatre district and is the home of both the school and company. Interestingly the building opened in 1983 and in comparison to the building that the ABS and TAB share, which opened in 1988, the SFB facilities seem less dated. Like the ABS, SFBS also recognizes the need for expansion in providing optimal training, rehearsal and fitness facilities, as operations of both organisations have expanded. SFBS has five large studios and uses company studios when needed. The number of studios available at SFBS coupled with larger studio sizes assists in the ability to deliver a training programme that is less limited by studio availability and allows for more virtuoso dance to be practised by its students. This is important in training students to be able to feel, use and take space.

The arrangement of company and school sharing facilities is without doubt a desirable prerequisite, as it enables aspiring students to experience a sense of the professional ballet world. SFSB students benefit from this arrangement as do ABS students, given we share the same floor level with TAB at the Primrose Potter Australian Ballet Centre. The opportunity for students to be able to watch company members taking daily class and company rehearsals is so enriching and provides invaluable education and stimulation for a student as they work to hone their technical and artistic skills through their training years. The sharing of facilities between school and company, where possible, is greatly advantageous to a young dancer's dance education and social and intellectual development.

I was interested to see how the timetable was structured at other vocational schools. The daily timetable at SFBS is structured utilising blocked periods for different year level students. For example, older students may, on some days, start later in the day allowing time for academic work to be covered before commencing ballet training. This approach is one worth further considering for ABS students, in terms of providing the most advantageous modes of learning from an academic, social and physical perspective.

Speaking with Patrick about the health and welfare services available to SFBS students, he advised me that the school currently offers lectures on nutrition and food preparation and upper level students participate in weekly Pilates classes. During my visit, unfortunately a student sustained an injury during class and I was able to note the following: whilst every duty of care was taken for the student at the time of injury, unfortunately medical or physiotherapist assistance was not available onsite. The student was assisted to the common room where ice and elevation were applied. I later learned that the student had sustained a fracture. In comparison to the allied subjects and health team services the ABS provides, I acknowledge how fortunate ABS students are in having a dedicated team of specialists onsite who look after them, providing immediate assistance and treatment, then in rehabilitating post injury and finally conditioning and coaching them to return to training. In comparison to the health and welfare services available to students at SFBS, the ABS is certainly providing excellence in dance science and medicine. These services are greatly admired and highly regarded by other dance training organisations.

A high priority on my agenda was to tour the facilities of the San Francisco Ballet School Residence. Located just a short ride on public transportation to SFBS, the residence is a three storey Edwardian building, housing up to 30 students. The function of the residence is to provide affordable housing and a sense of community to the top-level pre-professional ballet students. The residence is comprised of mostly double and triple occupancy rooms; many with private bathrooms and ample hall bathrooms and showers as well. Other amenities include a community kitchen and dining area, a common room with a piano and library, well-appointed entertainment room, a private garden and patio, and laundry facilities. The housing fees do not cover 24-hour supervision as students are of the pre-professional age group ranging from 16 – 19 years. However, two Resident Assistants share the morning and evening rosters, with both having their own apartments onsite. The students at the residence supply and prepare all their own meals, share a roster system for keeping the house clean and tidy, clean their own bedrooms, with external cleaners in attendance twice weekly for common areas.

Visiting the residence, I was warmly welcomed by the attending Resident Assistant and I was immediately impressed by the sense of community this residence provided. I was fortunate to arrive at a time when a few students were preparing breakfast and enjoying leisure time. The students I observed and spoke to were happy and engaging. During the tour of the residence I happened to speak with an Australian student who is currently training at SFBS. I asked her how she found the living arrangements and she told me that whilst she was feeling homesick for

Australia and her family, she was very happy living in the residence as it provided her with a safe haven, supervision and support.

As one would expect, there are comprehensive responsibilities and regulations established to govern the conduct of individuals living and visiting the residence, including curfew and quiet hours, security and safety rules. The Resident Assistants provide support and assistance in all matter related to the residents needs and deliver twice daily communications with the Students Services Co-ordinator and Registrar of the school. Student residents meet with the Resident Assistants at regular meetings, at informal gatherings and/or to discuss any problems and issues that have arisen. In essence, this residential facility is geared at providing a residence for students to live with like-minded peers, offering a sense of community and support, yet also promoting the learning of life and living skills to the pre-professional student.

Currently the ABS is the only elite vocational classical dance school in the world without a residence, an urgent issue the ABS has been tirelessly working to redress for some years. Talented students continue to be lost to international dance schools that provide the 24-hour care considered ideal for students studying in an intense and competitive learning environment. Whilst the SFBS residence is a very different model to the one that the ABS is aiming for, in relation to the age and purpose of providing residential facilities, it was most helpful to observe this residential facility. What was undeniably evident was the sense of 'home' and community that this facility provided. Information gained from my visit will be applied to ensure the development of architectural and operational plans for the ABS residence continues to be up dated.

The time I spent in San Francisco was invaluable. The opportunity to spend time, discussing training programmes, student development and student health and welfare with Patrick was most informative in the continuing advancement of elite classical ballet training and education. I was impressed by the school and the standard of the students. My thanks to Patrick, Christina and all members of staff for allowing me access to their organisation. I will continue to keep in contact with Patrick and SFBS and look to forge further sharing of knowledge between our two organisations.

Los Angeles

Masterpiece Dance Theatre

The next stop was Los Angeles where the prime objective was to spend time with Nadezhda Kalmanovskaya who has been teaching the 'Vaganova' syllabus for over 30 years. Nadya has the honour of being one of the sole individual recipients to have received written endorsement from the Russian Ministry of Culture in Moscow and the Vaganova Ballet School to teach the Vaganova curriculum in the United States of America and Canada.

Meeting with Nadya was of particular interest as the curriculum of the ABS's training programme, though unique to Australia, is based on that used by the Vaganova Academy. In 2007, recognizing

the need to foster new teachers and maintain the highest standards of training delivery, the ABS developed its own holistic, customised teacher training programme, which is also based on the eight-level system derived from the Vaganova method. It was for the reasons above that I was keen to meet with Nadya and to observe her teaching and learn from her knowledge.

Having only corresponded via email it was with high expectation and some apprehension that we finally met in Los Angeles. Nadya graciously allowed me to spend significant hours with her, which was a true testament to her passion and desire to share her knowledge. Unbeknown before our meeting, I soon learned that Nadya was undergoing comprehensive medical treatment and whilst she was full of stories and inspiration, our time together for her was exhausting. I am indebted to the time she gave me. Nadya, her husband Golden and I, travelled out of Los Angeles to where Nadya was teaching and lost not a moment in discussion.

Nadya was born in London and started her ballet training at age four. When she was 14 years old she was invited by the Artistic Director of the Bolshoi Ballet, Yuri Grigorovitch, to train and rehearse with the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow. Nadya was invited to continue her ballet studies in St. Petersburg, training exclusively at the Kirov Ballet Company, where she studied initially with Natalya Dudinskaya (formerly Artistic Director and Prima Ballerina) and Ninel Kurgapkina (former Director of the Vaganova Ballet Academy and former Ballet Mistress of the Kirov Ballet Company). It was whilst Nadya was training that she had the opportunity to substitute for Dudinskaya and teach a few classes. The teaching experience was invaluable as it created in her a passion to share and pass on the Vaganova methodology. Nadya's teacher, Natalya Dudinskaya, was a student of Agrippina Vaganova and was the leading professor of the Vaganova Ballet Academy. After finishing her studies with Dudinskaya, she started training with Ninel Kurgapkina, also a former student of Vaganova, and over 20 years ago Kurgapkina passed on what Nadya describes as the real inheritance; the Vaganova curriculum from the first to ninth levels. Nadya has permission from Leonid Nadirov, a former Director of the Ballet Academy, who is now the Vice-Minister of Russian Ministry of Culture, also from Konstantin Sergeev, the principal Ballet Master of the Kirov Ballet, and Altynai Asylmuratova, currently the Artistic Director of the Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg, not only to teach, but also to write a textbook on the Vaganova system.

Nadya's book, now close to completion, is her personal take on her experience from when she was training with the great ballerinas, Dudinskaya and Kurgapkina, and her personal opinion about training by this system. Through the book, Nadya wants to share what she learnt working with students of Vaganova herself. Her book describes the whole curriculum that she received from Kurgapkina, all nine levels, and is based on her personal experience, explaining how to make each movement and how to make it correctly. This project Nadya believes will benefit students and teachers alike and will serve as a reference for dance researchers and historians. A foundation called the Vaganova Ballet System, Ltd. has been established in the United States of America which will support, promote and otherwise market the curriculum and has already begun to organize a standardized training programme which will allow instructor certification to take place.

Nadya's passion for her teaching of the Vaganova system and her belief in the method, consumes her desire to teach young people. Teaching currently at a local dance school, she was methodical in her instruction and yet understanding of the students' abilities. I could clearly see that the students understood the elements of the method and, that whilst these students were not at an elite training institution, undoubtedly the syllabus and Nadya's teaching of it was providing results. In observing Nadya's teaching of the Vaganova method to that of my own and the teaching staff at the ABS, there was definite consistent crossover. I noted a few minor differences that Nadya and I talked about and that I have discussed with the ABS's pedagogical instructors, Michela Kirkaldie and Irina Konstantinova, who also trained at the Vaganova Academy.

What was also beneficial in this exploration was the opportunity to connect with another teacher who is passionate about the handing down of tradition. Nadya wants all students, dancers and the younger generation to be passionate about their training and in turn teach the traditions to the next generation. She wants to make sure that the great tradition and training which she received in Russia is passed on.

The opportunity for me to observe Nadya teaching, confirmed for me the importance for teachers needing to continually update their pedagogical practises and improve their skills, also helping to remain enthusiastic and inspirational. I have been inspired and buoyed by the opportunity to learn from another teacher, one who was happy to share her knowledge and experience. Nadya plans to visit Australia in the near future where she is hoping to impart her knowledge, passion and experience. I look forward to continuing our friendship and welcome the opportunity to meet again with her in the future.

Houston

[Houston Ballet Company and Houston Ballet Academy](#)

Visiting Houston Ballet and its Academy was full of purpose and expectation and I was not disappointed. I was warmly welcomed by Stanton Welch, Artistic Director of HB and Shelly Power, Director of the Academy.

Of keen interest was to look at the new facilities of HB and the Academy that opened in 2011. Boasting a six-story, 115,000 square foot facility costing \$46.6 million, the Houston Ballet Center for Dance, located in the heart of Houston's Theatre District is the largest professional dance company facility of its kind constructed in the United States of America. The building features nine large dance studios and a Dance Lab that seats 175 for presentations as well as rehearsals, and artistic, administrative and support facilities for the Company and Academy.

The building's interior has gallery-like spaces creating a spacious and airy feeling. There are double-height studios that offer interior views of dancers taking classes and rehearsals. These views provide a lovely sense of collaboration and integration of the professional dancers and students, and administration. The size of all the studios is enviable in that there is a sense of

spaciousness to be free to move and enjoy using and taking space. This is such a wonderful prerequisite in dance and movement in the training and development of elite dancers. The studios were certainly full of activity as were the expansive corridors, where the young students socialized between classes, also providing abundant space for warming up. The new world class facilities are certainly enviable in comparison to the facilities shared by the ABS and TAB.

The Academy has three divisions including preschool, main school and Houston Ballet 11(HB11). The preschool division offers classes in creative dance and pre-ballet technique from ages four to six years, laying the foundation for further study of classical ballet. I was able to view both a creative and pre-ballet class. The creative class was full of joyous little faces having fun exploring rhythm, movement and music. The pre-ballet class, whilst still exploring rhythm and music, provided more of the structure of a ballet class. The students were spending time practising parallel jumps and spring points at the barre, fine tuning motor skills and practising balance from one foot to the other. I was refreshingly reminded of all of the benefits that dancing provides from such an early age.

The main school division, to which entry is via audition only, covers an eight year programme commencing at Level 1. Students in the main division of the Academy follow a structured sequence of training that has been designed to increase their technical skills, stamina and discipline in accordance with their age and physical development. The general age group at Level 1 is around seven years of age, attending once or twice a week and from Level 4 students begin to attend a minimum of three days per week. Watching a Level 1 class, there was clearly a more structured approach to the discipline required for ballet and introduction to training than the younger age groups. The class contained a nice balance of stationary and travelling movements. The progression when watching the Level 3 class was evident, as one would expect, with students achieving a deeper understanding, knowledge and technical ability. I was interested to note that the classes I observed had the stretching and flexibility component of the training interspersed within the structure of the class. This, I felt, assisted the teachers knowledge of each individual student's capabilities and by interspersing the stretch element to the class, which is of course essential to their training, also provided a welcome interjection from the concentration and focus required in applying attention to detail in executing technical elements. As we too recognize at the ABS, it is in these younger years that the foundations are laid for better technical proficiency, building sequentially over the years as the student reaches closer to a pre-professional level. This is fundamental to the future of elite dance training and its success, and as the national school and School of TAB, it is the ABS's duty and responsibility to fulfil.

In the upper levels at the Academy, classes in technique, pointe work, pas de deux, men's technique, character dance and music are offered. I was able to observe classical and pas de deux classes in Levels 7 and 8 of the Academy, as well as class and rehearsals of HB11, which is HB's second company and part of Houston Ballet Academy. HB11 consists of students from the second company and their primary study is in Vaganova, however, Cecchetti and RAD are also emphasized. In addition, students are also offered a mix of modern classes including Limon, Cunningham, Graham, and Evans styles of movement and other dance styles. With the

choreographic expectations required of professional dancers these days, offering a variety of contemporary styles for students is advantageous and worthy of further consideration for the ABS training curriculum.

HB11 students are seconded to the main company and perform regularly to serve the greater Houston community by providing professional performances. This was of interest to see the students in preparation for performances, as this is a similar arrangement for the ABS's Level 8 Graduate Year students who join TAB's Dancers Company and tour regional Australia. Like HB11, The Dancers Company provides invaluable professional performing experience and is an important component of preparation for the dance profession. The standard of the dancers in HB11 is high, as one would expect the standard of trainee dancers close to entering the profession. Again, one difference noted, similar to SFBS's Trainee Program, students entering HB11 are also invited from external sources and are not necessarily students who have trained through the main school.

HB is proud of its state of the art body conditioning and Pilates training facility. An enviable gym and fitness room is available for the students to use, also shared with the Company. There is a dedicated team of body conditioning instructors and the expansive area is equipped with extensive exercise equipment. When students of the Academy are injured or being rehabilitated they are able to access the staffed gym facilities, assisting with getting them back to training as soon as possible. The accessibility to a fully equipped and staffed gym facility is very desirable in providing the very best of care to our students and is one that is currently being explored by the ABS. Academy students also attend classes in Yamuna ball technique as well as other dance related and non-dance related injury prevention classes. Similar to the ABS, onsite health clinics are held regularly to assist students.

I was able to visit the Houston Ballet's chaperoned dormitory, which is located on the 6th floor of the Center for Dance. The dormitory has space for 16 students and a live-in chaperone. The dormitory is located just a few stories up from the Academy studios, so provides easily accessible accommodation. Like the rest of the building, it is new and fresh with open plan living, dining and kitchen facilities which provide a spacious retreat for the young dancers. Bedrooms are generally double occupancy with genders separated from one side of the dormitory to the other. On speaking with Shelly Power, the Academy's Director, the Academy is looking to review the dormitory arrangements and is considering the option of the dormitory accommodation being used for the younger age group that require more full-time chaperoned care and to seek alternative off site accommodation for the pre-professional students.

Like the ABS, some students in Houston choose the option of living with home-stay families while the older students may rent apartments in the local area. Whilst these options are adequate for some, we know in Australia some parents are reluctant to utilise these options and delay entry of their child into the ABS and, despite the obvious disadvantages of distance, some choose to send their sons and daughters to training institutions overseas including school's such as Houston and San Francisco. The Academy offers assistance in finding students accommodation as does the ABS and, whilst Houston has only provision for a small number of students, it was helpful to learn from

Houston how it is looking to improve and provide more accommodation as not all students are able to access this vital service. Without doubt, the provision of a residence has the potential to deliver the security, emotional stability and social environment for students and therefore improve the training outcomes at the ABS.

I have known Stanton Welch for many years and it was a pleasure to reconnect with him again since he has assumed the leadership of HB in 2003. It was during his time as a dancer with TAB that his choreographic career developed, with some of his earliest ballets choreographed for The Dancers Company. Stanton expressed an interest in forging new opportunities between our organisations including establishing exchange opportunities for not only students, but also teachers and musicians. This would be a wonderful opportunity to pursue in the future.

New York

The School of American Ballet

First stop on my agenda was to observe classes at The School of American Ballet (SAB). SAB is the official training academy of the New York City Ballet (NYCB), established in 1934 by the legendary George Balanchine. The choreography created by George Balanchine demanded dancers to move with unprecedented speed, precision and intense musicality and today this unique American style is cultivated at the SAB. Most of the teaching faculty at SAB are current or former dancers with NYCB, with Peter Martins, Balanchine's successor, as Artistic Director and Chairman of Faculty.

The technique taught at the SAB is based on the classic traditions projected forward by George Balanchine¹ with the style being unique to the SAB. Students at the SAB participate in classes including technique, pointe work, variations, adagio, men's class, character and ballroom dancing, gymnastics, weight training and music, with entry to the SAB via audition only. The school has approximately 500 students, ranging in age from 6 to 18 and they attend classes during the school's ten-month Winter Term and five-week Summer Course. Most students enrolled in the Children's Division are residents of metropolitan New York with the intermediate and advanced students hailing from other American states and international countries.

I was invited to observe the advanced level female classical class being taught by Kay Mazzo, Co-Chairman of Faculty and former dancer of NYCB. The females executed class on pointe and from the moment class started the pace was set. Female students at the SAB are required to wear pointe shoes in all intermediate and advanced divisions in support of Balanchine's goal, for dancers to move quickly and effortlessly on pointe. I was impressed by the strength of the students on pointe. The tempi of the exercises, as set by Kay and executed by the students, was certainly very quick, often with the dancers using a short sharp plié and relevé with little time to place the heels on the floor. The class moved quickly through many combinations of exercises both on the barre and in the centre.

¹ Balanchine is a trademark of The George Balanchine Trust

The following day I was invited to observe the advanced males class. I was impressed with the structure of the class, in particular, being quite clearly divided into three sections of half hour blocks; barre, centre practice that included multiple turning sequences in all exercises, followed by a half an hour of allegro. The males clearly enjoyed the opportunity to practise their pirouettes and allegro including extensive batterie work. The class focus was noticeably on building physical strength and power required for male dancing. The students in the classes appeared hungry for the work and complex repetition of exercises; this was positive to see.

The School of American Ballet is housed in the Samuel B. and David Rose Building at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in Manhattan. A vibrant location, full of learning and culture, this is certainly a great location to be trained in. As with the other organisations I visited, I was keen to tour the SAB residential facilities they share with The Juilliard School. Intermediate and Advanced students who live out-of-state or too far to commute, may apply for living space in the residence hall. There are 64 SAB students that occupy four floors of the 18 storey residence hall with double and single rooms arranged in suites that each contain two or more bathrooms. All floors have laundry facilities with coin-operated washers and dryers. A large kitchen, library, computer room and two television lounges are available for use by all resident students.

I was fortunate to be escorted on a tour by Sion Harrington, Director of Residence Life. The residence is professionally staffed 24-hours per day with 24-hour adult supervision. It is highly staffed with three full-time live-in professional staff members, three Assistant Resident Hall Directors and four student Community Development Assistants, as well as front desk security. I was impressed by the level of supervision and the procedures and policies in place for the care and supervision of these students. Like HB's dormitory, the housing is located in the School's Rose building and is accessible by private elevators to the living facility.

SAB and The Juilliard School operate a dining hall offering high-quality nutritious food in the Rose Building for the benefit of students, students' families, and the artists, staffs and guests of Lincoln Center's constituents. I visited the dining hall and was impressed with the extensive choices available to the students with weekly meal plans providing a good balance of nutritional options. The students I observed and spoke with in the residence all spoke highly of the residence and how fortunate they were to be able to live in the accommodation provided. Students on scholarship are first awarded space in the residence, with the remaining rooms allotted to other students based on age and inability to commute.

In order to keep up with world's best practice, with particular reference to the duty of care of students, the ABS has continued to consult with dance institutions such as The School of American Ballet and other international schools. As the ABS has recognized, the staffing of a residence is the key to the emotional and cognitive developmental needs of young adolescents and is the most essential component in achieving world's best practice. I believe that SAB has achieved this well and through the fellowship I have been able to forge a further opportunity to connect with Sion Harrington. He has offered his assistance in sharing practical information and insight from the experiences they have gained through their years of running a residential facility for elite training

students. Through my experience I will share my learning with those who are working towards the ABS's mission to achieve this vital element that Australia's national centre for elite vocational classical dance is missing.

Dance Theatre of Harlem

Whilst visiting New York, I could not miss the opportunity of catching up with a former student of the ABS, Francis Lawrence, who is currently dancing with Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH). Francis kindly and eagerly organised for me to view the company in class and rehearsals, to attend the opening night performance of DTH inaugural New York Season and to meet with the Director of Dance Theatre of Harlem School, Endalyn Taylor.

I was keen to discuss with Endalyn the mission of the organisation and the inspiring work that it does for the community as a leading arts education centre and through its national and international education and community outreach programme, Dancing Through Barriers. Arthur Mitchell the founder of DTH, who was the first African American to become a permanent member of NYCB, understood the power of training in a classical art form to bring discipline and focus to a challenged community. The programmes offered by DTH are premised on carrying a solid commitment towards enriching the lives of young people and adults around the world through the arts. Whilst I was unable to observe any younger level classes, I was able to briefly observe the trainee level students in rehearsal. The standard of the students was promising. The sense I felt in this organisation was that of enriching children's lives through the power of arts and education, where students have a safe haven in which to explore and express themselves.

The American Ballet Theatre National Training Curriculum

During my visit I was able to connect with Franco De Vito, Principal of American Ballet Theatre's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School (JKO) and Raymond Lukens, Director, American Ballet Theatre National Training Curriculum and faculty at ABT's JKO School. Franco and Raymond, along with ABT's Artistic Advisors and Medical Advisory Board, are the designers of The American Ballet Theatre (ABT) National Training Curriculum, and have also written the Guidelines for Ballet Training. The ABT National Training Curriculum has been designed to help and empower ballet teachers, offering courses to new and experienced teachers. The course accreditation includes opportunity to become ABT certified teachers, ABT affiliated teachers or a further option with New York University, offering the first ever graduate programme in Dance Education with a concentration in Ballet Pedagogy.

I was keen to meet with them to discuss their ideas and theories on dance instruction and pedagogy. We were able to spend an evening together discussing their training programme. This was of interest to me, in regards to the Teacher Training Programme that the ABS offers. Being two organisations committed to training teachers of the future, this opportunity to connect was fruitful and one which I hope will continue to evolve. I have shared my discussions with the ABS's

Director, Pedagogic Instructor and Head of Teacher Training as our organisation continues to expand current and create new, dance-teacher training courses.

Youth America Grand Prix

The last stop on my journey was to attend the Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) International Dance Competition, the world's largest International Ballet Student Scholarship Audition which occurs in New York every April. This competition afforded me the opportunity to see and experience the annual gathering of emerging young dance students. This year YAGP celebrated its 14th season and made its spectacular return for the finals and gala performance at the historic David H. Koch Theatre at the Lincoln Centre. The final gala was a thrilling emergence of young promising talent combined with impressive performances from international stars.

Through its grassroots competition and mentoring programs, the YAGP helps talented young dancers by providing the forum to receive scholarships from leading dance schools in the world. The YAGP offers dance students the rare opportunity to be seen, taught and professionally guided by the Directors and faculty members of the world's foremost companies and schools.

This year 26 nations presented students ageing from 8 to 20 years in three divisions: pre competitive, junior and senior. It was an exhilarating finish to the fellowship, giving me a rare opportunity to see students from other leading dance training institutions gathered together on one stage. The opportunity to connect with Directors and leading faculty members from other leading training organisations including The Royal Ballet School, John Cranko School of Stuttgart Ballet, Zurich Dance Academy, Canada's National Ballet School, ABT JKO School, Joffrey Ballet's Academy of Dance and New Zealand School of Dance, to name but a few, was truly a richly rewarding experience. The occasion to discuss training, health and welfare, education and advancing dance with like-minded organisations and the willingness of the leaders to share their knowledge for the future of elite training institutions was invaluable.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The opportunity to visit the San Francisco Ballet School, Houston Ballet Academy and School of American Ballet provided me with a window through which I could view and compare the ABS, of which I share with you my findings and recommendations.

Training Programme

Currently benchmarked with the top seven international schools in the world, I strongly believe the training programme offered at the ABS is of a world class standard. The ABS's training programme, which is unique to Australia, is based on a unified pedagogical system whose principles have been progressively developed and codified. The benefit of a sequential training programme from a young age is proven throughout the world and such graded, sequential systems are used by the major Russian, European, English and Canadian schools.

It is therefore recommended that the ABS continues to develop and review its training curriculum and to ensure the organisation continues to remain up-to-date with dance science and dance training theories. This will facilitate more effective outcomes for students and dance training in Australia.

As the national school of Australia, the ABS's measure of success is shown by the high percentage of successful graduates achieved each year. The majority of dancers in TAB are graduates of the ABS, including the current Artistic Director. Typically, almost 90% of ABS graduates secure contracts of employment with professional dance companies within 12 months of graduation; this average is one of the highest employment rates of any tertiary institution in Australia. This clearly illustrates the success of the ABS to date.

In order to maintain best practice in vocational dance training, it is essential that professional development through activities such as exchange programmes and educative sessions are accessible to all staff members to keep abreast of pedagogic and current teaching skills. Continual expansion of the ABS's Teacher Training Programme to include the development of additional dance teacher training courses will assist in training the teachers of the future and will benefit the broader dance community through the sharing of dance-related knowledge.

Health and Welfare

From what I was able to observe, the ABS's specialist care and comprehensive services offered to students is of an extremely high standard on a global scale with the innovative practices and standards the envy of many health professionals consulting to international vocational dance schools. Recognized internationally as leaders in the field, the ABS's Health and Welfare team has been cited by experts as 'world's best practice' by Rachel Rist (Head of Dance, the Arts Educational School, Tring, England), when President of the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS), calling it 'the dream team'.

Therefore, it is recommended that support for ongoing professional development is essential in continuing to provide the ABS's dancers with increasingly high levels of technique, physical strength, flexibility, stamina and the emotional stability to withstand the high pressure environment of life in a recognized dance company.

It is a priority for the ABS that all students have a broad-based, comprehensive education which equips them to pursue vocations in dance, the allied arts and also areas outside dance. With the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS) as providers of the ABS's academic programme, students are provided a safe and nurturing learning environment that recognises and caters for the different academic, artistic, cultural, health and pastoral needs. It is recommended to continue to strengthen the relations between the ABS and VCASS to facilitate the ongoing provision of training and education that facilitates excellence.

Facilities and relationship with TAB

Since the official opening of Primrose Potter Australian Ballet Centre in 1988, the ABS and the TAB have expanded their operations and the facilities are now small and out-dated in comparison with world standards. However, visiting the other organisations highlighted the many advantages that shared arrangements between schools and companies can provide. The importance of the link not only in the sharing of facilities but the symbiotic relationship between the ABS and TAB is of great importance to retain and to further develop. "Great companies are married to great schools" - continuing to strengthen the ties and relationship between the two organisations is vital in creating the future dancers of Australia for TAB and for other companies; ultimately contributing to our society and economy through the arts.

Residential Facilities

In order to continue to contribute to the future of dance as an art form in Australia and to remain competitive on a national and international level, the ABS must secure residential facilities for its students. The simple fact is that the ABS is the only elite vocational classical dance school in the world without a student residence. My visit to the residences of SFB, HB and SAB confirmed just how imperative it is for the ABS to provide safe, secure residential accommodation.

A student residence is crucial to make the training programme more accessible to regional Victorian, interstate and international students and, thereby, increase the potential pool of talented dancers who may seek to train at the ABS. Without a suitable residence, certain talent is lost usually to overseas institutions with fully integrated dance/academic programmes and supervised student accommodation. Students studying overseas are more likely to enter the affiliated overseas company rather than returning to their home country, therefore, losing certain talent from Australia. Residential care for a student, from the appropriate age, is essential if they are to become the very best dancer they can be. Timing is everything and as the ABS approaches its 50th anniversary, a student residence must become a reality.

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Opportunities for sharing information arising from this fellowship have commenced and I continue to share my learning and knowledge gained through educative and personal communication with fellow colleagues at the ABS. The process of reflective thinking and writing has also been informative.

By applying the knowledge and information garnered, it is hoped to further improve and develop the vocational dance training by adopting the strategies I have learned; adapting them to the Australian way of teaching and transmitting these through the complexities of the ABS as an organisation. It is my intention to utilise the knowledge gained not only for the ABS and the ABS's Interstate/International Training Programme, but through to the broader Australian dance community, by means of community access programmes and dance-specific media opportunities such as written contributions in Australian dance publications.

I believe the future is exciting as the ABS continues to grow and develop ensuring the future of our national company and classical dance in Australia.