

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by Megan Connelly, 2014 Churchill Fellow

THE STUART AND NORMA LESLIE CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP

to study dance training, coaching and rehabilitation methods
used in international companies and schools.

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Signed Megan Connelly

Dated 24.03.15

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Introduction

I am honoured to receive the Stuart and Norma Leslie Churchill Fellowship to study dance training, coaching and rehabilitation methods used in international companies and schools. Norma has been incredibly supportive and encouraging during this process and I am indebted to her generosity in making this life changing experience possible. I also pay tribute to the late Stuart Leslie for his vision and passion to support the arts and particularly dance in Australia.

I would also like to express my gratitude to everyone at the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. It has been an incredibly rewarding and positive experience from beginning to end. Thank you.

My trip took me to four countries, five cities, seven major ballet companies and four major training institutions. The warm welcome I received from these prestigious organisations was truly humbling. I am grateful to all the individuals who gave their time, knowledge and expertise so openly and generously; particularly the dancers and coaches who allowed me to share the intimate space of the rehearsal studio. These experiences have left a deep impression on me.

My sincere appreciation and thanks go to my referees and mentors, David McAllister AM and Lucinda Sharp Bsc, MPsych, MAPS, for their ongoing support and belief in me. I also gratefully acknowledge the support of Marilyn Rowe OAM, The Australian Ballet School and The Australian Ballet for supporting my application and giving me study leave to undertake this Fellowship.

Thank you to my daughter's chaperones, Fiona, Tilly and Lorrie who took care of her as we all travelled together, giving me the freedom to study, reflect, think, learn and explore. I couldn't have done this trip without you.

And finally, thanks to my Dad, whose endless support enables me to fulfill my passion for the care and development of dancers, dance teaching and gives me the possibility to dream.

Executive Summary

Name: Megan Connelly
Occupation: **Ballet Mistress and Rehabilitation Specialist**, The Australian Ballet,
Classical Ballet Lecturer, Australian Ballet School
Address: The Australian Ballet, 2 Kavanagh Street, Southbank, VIC 3006 **Telephone:**(03) 9669 2700

Project Description

The main purpose of this report is to benchmark and investigate dance training, coaching and rehabilitation methods used in international organisations similar to The Australian Ballet (TAB) and the Australian Ballet School (ABS). As Australia's national flagship dance training and performing organisations we are expected to demonstrate excellence and best practice in all areas including maintaining relevance and currency with the international dance community.

I am a retired dancer and a professional ballet teacher. My work is concerned with understanding research findings of dance medicine science and applying them, with direction by specialist dance physiotherapists, to the aesthetic requirements of classical ballet as they apply to various body types. In turn, I must use this information to support the technical and artistic development of Australia's best vocational ballet students and professional ballet dancers. In short, I integrate dance medicine science to create, nurture and sustain art. This trip allowed me to take my knowledge and experience and stand back from the detail to look at the broad brushstrokes of the way in which international vocational students and professional dancers are managed and developed by their respective artistic and medical teams. To do this, I also needed to study the training, coaching styles and pedagogical information of master teachers and coaches to help me bring the dance and science closer together.

My journey took me to New York, Paris, London, Moscow and St Petersburg, where I was able to observe classes, rehearsals and performances as well as meet with various directors, sports doctors, therapists, teachers and dancers.

Major lessons and conclusions

It soon became clear to me that on the balance of practical application of dance medicine science, communication between allied health professionals and artistic staff, and implementation of injury prevention initiatives, Australia is a world leader. This was most evident during my visit to American Ballet Theatre (ABT) when I was asked to present one of The Australian Ballet's injury prevention programs to their Artistic Director. I was humbled and proud to 'wave the Aussie flag' in New York.

Every part of this trip was of enormous value and re-focused the lense through which I view dance and dance teaching, but particular highlights include meeting and observing coaches Irina Kolpokova and Clinton Lueckert (American Ballet Theatre), physical therapist Marika Molnar (New York City Ballet), master teachers Monique Loudières (Paris Opera Ballet) and Ludmilla Semonyaka (Bolshoi Ballet), rehabilitation coach Ursula Hageli (Royal Ballet), Director Elizabeth Platel (Paris Opera Ballet School) and all of the dancers, particularly Ashley Bouder (New York City Ballet), Alina Cojocar (English National Ballet), the male dancers of Paris Opera Ballet and Xander Parish and Yekaterina Kondourova (Mariinsky).

In terms of training and coaching, Australia is doing well in producing technically competent dancers, but I see a trend emerging of a loss of natural sense of movement and a fearlessness and confidence that we have been known for in the past. I also felt a sense of pride and achievement within the companies I visited that we don't always allow ourselves in Australia. Other lessons and conclusions that I believe are linked to these findings include the need to develop our musicality and phrasing, use of speed, weight transference, self-confidence, freedom of movement, virtuosity, batterie, mentorship and collegiality, celebration of our lineage and promotion of our history.

Dissemination

I have already delivered my findings through meetings and presentations to the Director and staff of both TAB and the ABS. I have also been invited to make a presentation to the Board of the ABS in the coming months. I am sharing and implementing my findings to the current and future generations of dancers through my classes and coaching sessions in both organisations. Other avenues include regional and national guest teaching engagements, public education programs and external training programs through TAB, ABS and various media opportunities including dance specific publications and websites.

Programme

New York 26 November to 5 December 2014

American Ballet Theatre (ABT)

- Observed class and met with Ballet Master Clinton Lockett
- Observed class given by soloist Craig Solstein
- Observed coaching given by Irina Kolpokova and Susan Jones (Dancers being coached included Misty Copeland, Craig Solstein, Gillian Murphy, Hee Seo)
- Observed treatments and had discussions with Dr Peter Marshall & physiotherapist, Julie Daugherty
- Meeting with Artistic Director Kevin McKenzie & Assistant Artistic Director Victor Barbee

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School of American Ballet (JKO)

- Observed class and met with Director Franco De Vita
- Observed class and rehearsal given by Raymond Lukens
- Meeting with Pilates instructor Clarice Marshall

New York City Ballet (NYCB)

- Observed treatments and met with physical therapist Marika Molnar
- Participated in NYCB conditioning class given by Marika Molnar
- Observed class given by Andre Kramarevsky
- Observed dress rehearsals run by Artistic Director Peter Martins (Cast: Rebecca Krohn and Ashley Boudier)
- Watched performance of *Nutcracker* at David Koch Theatre (Cast: Tiler Peck, Maria Kowroski, Tyler Angle)

School of American Ballet (SAB)

- Observed class and met with Suki Schorer
- Observed class given by Arch Higgins
- Observed intermediate pas de deux class
- Meeting with Co-Chairman of Faculty Kay Mazzo
- Observation and meeting with physical therapist Andrea Zujko

Steps On Broadway (Steps)

- Observed class and met with Wilhelm Burmann and Espen Giljane
- Performance given by Alvin Ailey Company at New York City Centre (*Uprising, Unfold, A grateful gathering, and Revelations* (with live band))

Paris 6 to 14 December 2014

Paris Opera Ballet (POB)

- Observed classes given by Artistic Director Benjamin Millepied and Ballet Master Andre Klemm
- Observed class and met with guest teacher Monique Loudières
- Observed general rehearsal given by Agnes Letetsu
- Watched performance of Nureyev's *Nutcracker* at Bastille Theatre
- Watched performance of Guillaume Bart's *La Source* at Palais Garnier (Cast: Ludmilla Pagliero, Karl Paquette, Laetitia Pujol, Vincent Chaillet, Emmanuel Thibault)

Paris Opera Ballet School (POBS)

- Observed rehearsal and met with Artistic Director Elisabeth Platel
- Observed female and male classes, various levels.
- Met with female graduate year teacher (1st division teacher) Fanny Gaida
- Watched performance of Class Demonstration by all students at Palais Garnier
- Invited to attend pre-screening of film *Scaramusch* featuring POBS students

London 14 to 22 December 2014

Royal Ballet (RB)

- Observed classes given by Deidra Chapman and Antonia Franceschi
- Observed coaching sessions given by Ursula Hageli (dancers being coached included Roberta Marquez, Fernando Montano and Christina Arestis)
- Observed coaching given by Alexander Agadzhyanov and Lesley Collier (dancers being coached included Frederico Bonelli, Akane Takada)
- Observed treatment and met with physiotherapist Moira McCormack
- Met with Clinical Director (Healthcare) Gregory Retter
- Observed gym training sessions given by Brian Maloney and Frank Appel
- Watched performance of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Royal Opera House (Cast: Sarah Lamb, Frederico Bonelli, Zenaida Yanowsky, Steven McRae, Alexander Campbell)
- Watched performance of *Don Quixote*, Royal Opera House (Cast: Natalia Osipova Act 1, replaced by Akane Takada in Act 2 & 3 due to injury, Matthew Golding)

Royal Ballet School (RBS)

- Meeting with Head of Outreach and Teacher Training Mark Annear
- Tour of Whitelodge (Lower School) and Upper School in Floral St.
- Class and rehearsal observation at Whitelodge given by Kenta Kura and met with classical teacher Belinda Hatley
- Class observation at Upper School given by Daria Klimentova
- Observed pas de deux class at Upper School
- Meeting with female graduate teacher Nicola Tranah
- Meeting with physiotherapist Luke Abnett

English National Ballet (ENB)

- Observed class given by Hua Fang Zhang and Antonio Castilla
- Observed coaching given by Antonio Castilla
(dancers being coached included Tamara Rojo and Alejandro Virelles)
- Meeting with Artistic Co-ordinator (including coaching) Jane Haworth
- Watched performance of *Nutcracker*, London Coliseum
(Sugar Plum - Alina Cojocar, Prince - Alejandro Virelles)

Moscow 28 December 2014 to 3 January 2015

Bolshoi Ballet BB

- Met with Executive Producer Maria Frolova
- Met with General Manager of Bolshoi Theatre Anton Getman
- Met with Artistic Director Sergey Filin
- Met with Ballet Mistress Ludmila Semenyaka
- Observed classes and coaching given by Boris Akimov, Alexander Vetrov, Ludmila Semenyaka, Nina Semizorova, Svetlana Adyrkhaeva
(dancers being coached included Semyon Chudin, Daria Khokhlova, Artemy Belyakov, Denis Rodkin, Evgenia Obratsova)
- Watched performance of *Nutcracker* at Bolshoi Theatre
(Sugar Plum - Ekaterina Krysanova, Prince - Vladislav Lantratov)

St Petersburg 3 to 10 January 2015

Mariinsky Ballet

- Observed classes and coaching given by Igor Petrov, Elena Vorontsova, Elena Yevteyeva, Gennady Selyutsky, Sergei Vikharov, Nikita Scheglov, Elvira Tarasova and Victor Baranov
(dancers being coached included Kimin Kim, Yekaterina Kondurova, Oxana Skorik, Xander Parish, Oxana Bondareva and Ernest Latypov)
- Watched 2x performances of *Swan Lake* at Mariinsky Theatre I
(Oxana Skorik, Xander Parish and Viktoria Tereshkina, Vladimir Shklyarov)
- Watched performance of *Anna Karenina* at Mariinsky Theatre II
(Ulyana Lapotkina, Viktor Baranov, Yuri Smekalov, Nadezhda Batoeva, Filipp Stepin)

The Vaganova Academy

- Watched performance of *Nutcracker*
(Sugar Plum - Anastasia Lukina, Prince - Yevgeny Kuznetsov)
- Given private tour of Vaganova Museum
- Observed class of the level 4 and 5 students

New York

American Ballet Theatre (ABT) Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School of American Ballet (JKO) New York City Ballet (NYCB) School of American Ballet (SAB) Steps on Broadway

First stop was New York.

I was expecting speed....but I have rarely seen anyone move as fast as Ashley Bouder, Principal of NYCB as *Dewdrop* in Balanchine's *Nutcracker*. She was fearless, and her technique was clean and meticulous. Her musicality and co-ordination were effortless but they were also the driving force for that incredible locomotion. The rest of the company were also impressive in their speed though not always as clean and meticulous. Ashley seemed to achieve the balance of moving quickly, still finding time to prepare well and be on her leg so that she didn't look rushed, just dazzling. I tried to understand this during my week in New York.

Musicality and speed begin to emerge as themes

At SAB, (NYCB is almost 100% made up of SAB graduates), I watched three different levels of classes both classical and pas de deux ages 14 to 18. It is clear that the training is designed to get the dancers on the front of their feet for speed with the heels (mainly in the female dancers) often released off the ground. It is a very particular style and way of moving. Suki Schorer's class was all on pointe with fast and intricate exercises. Quick footwork and changes of direction seemed designed to make the dancers transfer their weight and get into position in one clean movement. I didn't see the level of placement and technical detail that we often look for in our training but they were finding a certain freedom in their port de bras and use of space in allegro, particularly en manège, that we don't always utilise. Kay Mazzo, Co-Chairman of Faculty at SAB, quoted George Balanchine: "if a dancer needs to release the heels due to lack of demi-plié then it should be just enough to slide a piece of paper underneath". He wanted a very soft landing with no noise and lots of articulation of the feet. This concept of the heel release can be misunderstood and exaggerated, resulting in ankle injuries.

Musicality, speed, freedom

Marika Molnar is the physical therapist with New York City Ballet and she allowed me to join a conditioning class that she gives the company dancers every Friday. This is a 50min class designed to act on the parasympathetic nervous system, helping the dancers recover at the end of a heavy working week. The class consists of simple movements performed on her latest invention, the *ParaSetter*. Previously, the dancers were using a standard foam roller but Marika wanted to address the problem of the discomfort of the spinous processes compressing into the roller. The *Parasetter* is made up of two narrower foam rollers bound together, which allow the spinous processes to rest in the channel between the two cylinders. The work focused on three dimensional breathing to encourage centering and strengthening the core muscles of the hips and torso and freeing up joint articulation. Since returning home, I have been able to apply this work directly to my rehabilitation classes, which has been particularly useful for an injured dancer who was 'non-weight bearing' for several weeks.

During physical therapy treatments, Marika begins by checking the dancers' calcaneal (heel) placement. She stands behind the dancer who is in parallel and asks them to spiral their spine gently right to left and watches how the heel bones shift from supination to pronation. This gives her information about joint stiffness in the lower legs, pelvis and spine. These are 15mins sessions and Marika has such a great 'eye' and knows the dancers so well that she can work quickly and efficiently. She was incredible to watch. I have paid particular attention to this area in my rehabilitation work since returning home and have been able to assist a number of dancers in re-aligning their weight placement through the hind foot. Incorrect weight placement through the foot has major implications in the way the legs, hips and back function. Some dancers allow the heel bone to slip underneath and forward due to a tucked pelvis and dysfunctional external rotation. Marika is currently overseeing the construction of a gym/Pilates space at NYCB's home at the David Koch Theatre. Soon the dancers will be able to do their conditioning and rehabilitation work on site instead of having to go 'off campus'.

Andrea Zujko is the physical therapist with SAB and oversees the students' conditioning work in their Pilates studio. She has worked closely with Marika for many years. Communication with each student's teacher is crucial to ensure medical advice is being followed through in the dance studio but often there is no time. To this end, she has designed a simple report card that she fills out after each consultation, which the student then takes to their teacher, advising of progressions or modifications. This would be a useful addition to our lines of communication at the ABS. The artistic and medical teams currently meet once a fortnight and this would assist the flow of information between meetings.

Steps on Broadway

New York

Steps offers daily dance classes to industry professionals as well as the general public and it was here that I finally met world renowned teacher Wilhelm (Willy) Burman. I have long been curious to see his work because he is known for giving a fast class, from the first *tendu* at the barre to the last *allegro*. His use of speed intrigued me. As a dancer, I think I would have struggled with the speed, but I couldn't dismiss his methodology because some of the world's leading dancers have chosen to work with Willy for most of their careers and his reputation as a master teacher is far reaching. The classes I watched included principals and soloists from POB, ABT, NYCB, Miami and San Francisco Ballet as well as non-professionals.

The more I watched and listened, the more I realised his work is about transference of weight and being on one leg or another, never between the two. This is something I am always working on with my dancers, but our approaches couldn't be more different. He uses the speed of the movement so that dancers don't have a choice about being 'on their leg'. They just have to be there. The preparation for each movement is embedded in the previous movement, there's nothing extra. The dancers I spoke to told me that this has helped them understand their bodies because they are forced to find a solution in Willy's classes and to think quickly. Maybe this also encourages them to use the music to help change direction and transfer weight? Dancers need to move with confidence in these classes. This style of class may not suit all body types or physicality but there were many take home messages. His cues include:

- 'Supporting' leg is the 'working' leg;
- On demi-pointe, reach down through supporting foot and up through the hip;
- Place two hands to supporting shoulder in pirouette to help find weight transfer;
- Move into arabesque from under supporting hip not forward in chest;
- Be on one leg or the other, never in between.

Willy gives almost exactly the same barre in every class. This is often done in vocational training when a teacher will keep the same class for a week or two. I have decided to incorporate this into my company coaching classes on a monthly basis. Many injuries occur due to dysfunctional alignment and placement, which is reinforced in a dancers' daily class. A small amount of repetition at the beginning (the 'set up') of each class would allow more time for the 'how' instead of the 'what'. I have found that attention to the fine detail of alignment has improved and we finish the barre earlier, affording more time for allegro and virtuosity.

Musicality, speed, freedom, transference of weight

American Ballet Theatre was another highlight. There was such a calm feeling about the place and the people - ironic for New York. They were preparing for their *Nutcracker* and *Cinderella* seasons. In contrast to NYCB, ABT dancers come from all over the world. While this gives ABT an exciting mix of dancers, it has its challenges in achieving uniformity. The feeder school, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School of American Ballet run by Director Franco de Vita seeks to address this. It has operated in its current form for a decade and 24 students have graduated into the company in that time. I watched a rehearsal of the graduate level students in a work by Anthony Tudor called *Soiree Musicale*. The footwork and stylised movements make it a very good piece for students to perform and would suit

our ABS graduate students well. Interestingly, The Australian Ballet's founding Artistic Director, Dame Peggy van Praagh, was an original cast member in 1938.

The most striking thing about the ABT dancers was the use of their backs, especially the ladies. I think this was as much about mental attitude as it was technique. The dancers in this company have an 'edge' to them - a desire that says 'now or never'. Although I empathise that some of this might come from a feeling of competition or lack of job security, they had a pride and energy about them that was refreshing to watch.

Musicality, speed, freedom, transference of weight, pride and confidence

American Ballet Theatre has a dedicated area for gym/Pilates and physical therapy, headed by Dr Peter Marshall and Julie Daugherty. The dancers' injury management is quite different to TAB because ABT dancers have various lay off periods throughout the year, which presents challenges in continuity of care, injury prevention programs and treatments and consistent levels of dance fitness. Occasionally, ABT Ballet Master, Clinton Lueckert, helps dancers return to work with rehabilitation coaching. This is mostly done outside normal working hours. With these challenges in mind, I was approached to give a presentation on the implementation of TAB's calf rises into daily class (part of our lower leg and foot injury prevention program) because whether the dancers are working or not, they will generally always participate in daily class. The calf rise information has been well documented, but the inclusion of them into the sacred format of a ballet class with our attention to form and detail is unique to TAB and ABS. I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues Artistic Director David McAllister AM, Principal Physiotherapist Susan Mayes and Body Conditioning Specialist Paula Baird-Colt who implemented this approach at TAB and Marilyn Rowe at the ABS. Since my visit, ABT and JKO have now implemented this program into their daily class.

I was very fortunate to observe Ballet Mistress Irina Kolpokova coaching the female dancers in principal roles. Irina was in the last graduating class of Agrippina Vaganova in 1951, whose system of training forms the basis of training at the ABS. Right from her first movements and corrections she embodied the elements of the Russian Vaganova training system - the harmonious use of the whole body and mind to produce movement, artistic intention and full use of the space around her. She emphasised the feeling of the movement - lightness, weight, speed. To be fair she was coaching elite and accomplished dancers so the basic technique was assumed. It was intriguing to watch the movements become so much more than technique and indeed to see the technique strengthen through the artistic intention. It was fascinating to watch her deal with dancers who obviously trust and respect her immensely, but continue to feed their own insecurities about a minor detail of the line of the ankle, knee or head, which is often in the end quite momentary.

Sometimes dancers lose sight of the fact that the intention of the movement through the whole body *creates* the line and that the artistic impression on an audience is the most powerful element. This approach is still relevant in the rehabilitation stage, though not at all easy when focusing on a particular area of the body when movements are modified or if the dancer is experiencing discomfort. Artistically speaking, the daily repetition of placement as well as flow and co-ordination of the upper body, impacts on the bio-mechanics of the hips, legs and feet.

Musicality, speed, freedom, transference of weight, pride, confidence and artistic intention

Paris

Paris Opera Ballet (POB) Paris Opera Ballet School (POBS)

My week-long rendezvous in Paris began at Palais Garnier, with a performance by the POBS. Every December, the students present a season of highlights from their current class work in several specially staged 'demonstration' performances. Each year level shows a medley of *centre exercises*, from *tendu* and *pirouettes* through to *grand allegro* and *virtuosity* as well as some character dancing. They have another performance season in April, which is made up of works from the repertoire.

It felt surreal to be in that glorious theatre, so majestic and rich in history, watching the future members of the Paris Opera Ballet find their feet, so to speak (the stage has a rake of 3 degrees)! The audience was a mix of parents, friends and family of the students, as well as general public. The class teacher introduced their pianist and students and spoke a bit about each exercise. Corrections and encouraging comments were given throughout the class as the teachers tried to keep the mood relaxed to help the students' nerves.

History, lineage, cultural validity

There is a uniformed look in terms of physicality throughout POBS with beautiful proportions and long, lean muscles in all levels right through to graduate year. The use of their port de bras looked more relaxed than what I sometimes see in Australia and promoted a natural, organic sense of movement, mainly using simple *epaulement* rather than upper back *cambré*. There was a lack of tension in the upper body and a consistent and generous use of demi-plié. The selection process is quite stringent, so all the students have similar natural attributes including flexibility and demi-plié. The French system is designed not to impose a particular or 'set' style in the training of the upper body, so that the dancer is best able to adapt easily to the requirements of the various styles of repertoire. The first position of the arms in pirouettes seemed very round and high, which the boys used well, but I wonder if it slowed the girls down a bit. Their turns looked less dynamic. I liked the recognition given to the teachers during this performance. It felt as much about celebrating the art of teaching and pedagogical lineage as it was about the students.

Later that week, I observed POBS in daily classes at their studios in Nanterre. The class exercises were simple and succinct. Is this an element in this teaching methodology that helps the muscles maintain length and not bulk over the course of the training years? It also seemed to give the students the mental and physical energy to apply themselves entirely to each movement. There was a good variation of 'flavour' between exercises and the moderate length allowed the major emphasis to be spent on *allegro* – almost a third of each class. During my meeting with Fanny Gaida, the graduate girls' teacher, she explained that the use of *coup de pied devant* at the front of the ankle was more widely used in her classes instead of the wrapped *coup de pied*, so as not to 'over train' the 'fished' position, which can be injurious. The facilities in Nanterre include a gymnasium/Pilates room with an adequate amount of equipment and space which was available to the students at all times, making it easy for them to schedule conditioning and fitness sessions around their classes.

As in most vocational training institutions, the assessment process is ongoing throughout the year. The staff meet every few months to discuss the development and management of all the students. A formal assessment happens once a year and consists of essentially three variations as opposed to full class, pointe work and variations. They perform an *Adagio*, a *Pas d'Ecole* in a 'soubrette' style (footwork, small jumps and pirouettes) and a lyrical variation with bigger *allegro* and *grand tours*. This system aims to promote the performance aspect of the art form, using the technique to drive the artistry. The students either pass or fail. No other marks are given. The performances in December and April are also used as a marker to track the standard of each student, to determine whether they are capable of fulfilling the requirements of the course.

Unlike the Russian and Danish systems, the French system is not notated. Instead, the POBS only employs teachers who have trained at POBS and danced in POB, though not necessarily to the level of Étoile (highest ranking dancer). To assist lesson planning and goal setting to accommodate their

individual group, the teachers refer to footage of previous exams dating back to the 1970's to guide them.

Artistic Director of POBS and former Étoile, Elizabeth Platel, was extremely open and welcoming and appeared to have a wonderful relationship with the students. I watched her rehearse the final year students in *Napoli*, a Bournonville piece. Outside the studio she is warm, lively and engaged with the students and in rehearsal, firm, demanding and passionate. She shared her wealth of knowledge generously. I think her passion made them feel like she was sharing their journey and guiding them along their path, not just instructing them.

History, lineage, cultural validity, passion

Benjamin Millepied is the newly appointed Director of POB and it was a privilege to watch him teach company class. He insisted that musicality and musical phrasing starts everyday at the barre. He insisted that warming up and preparing the rhythmical part of yourself as a dancer is as important as the physical aspect. He stopped the music often and made the dancers repeat the exercise with the phrasing he had set. He worked closely with his pianist. Benjamin is also a celebrated choreographer and I am sure this is reflected in his insistence on musical accents, phrasing, precision and breath during class.

One of the biggest highlights of my trip was meeting POB guest teacher and former Étoile, Monique Loudières. She taught with passion and commitment to the art form and to the dancers in front of her. I loved it. Her classes gave the dancers wonderful opportunities to explore their body such as the length, stretch, strength, centre and space inside the joints as well as the space around the dancer. She reminds dancers that everything starts in the brain:

“The thought becomes an instruction to the body which has a feeling attached to it. Every movement should have meaning. Every movement never ends, whether it's slow, precise or still, there is a constant energy, a feeling, a hum in the body”.

We had many conversations about how dancers use repertoire to develop an understanding of their body, not just classwork, from the spirals and oppositions of Forsythe to the cleanliness, classical precision and style of Petipa. She believes it is important for dancers to crossover the elements from classical to contemporary and vice versa. For instance, using the groundedness and earthiness of contemporary dance to find weight in classical. She also emphasised the resistance and opposition embedded in movements, but more than anything it was her delivery and genuine desire for the dancers to understand that spoke to me, along with her emotional injection, attention to and insistence on detail. These are the valuable opportunities that have to be experienced in the same room, in the same moment of sharing, and that's why it is so important that Australia is able to bring guest teachers from around the world to inspire and inform our dancers. This is perhaps an additional expense, due to our geographic isolation, but it's crucial that we make it happen regularly. I hope Monique will visit us in the near future. Monique encouraged me not to be afraid to insist, to believe in myself, to experiment with content delivery and to always remain open to learning.

Generally in Paris, the articulation and length through the feet was beautiful, whether the foot was naturally highly arched or not. In allegro, POB's clean and fast footwork is so impressive, especially the *batterie* and particularly in the male dancers. They create and sustain the position in the air instead of moving through the position to land. Again, it seems linked to a “juicy demi-plié”, a lack of tension and a great desire to jump. They want to stay in the air. That's passion. Their virtuosity was outstanding and they did it in class everyday. I was also impressed with the flexibility of the male dancers and therefore their line. One expects that of an elite female dancer but it was quite beautiful to see the long, strong classical lines of the male dancers.

After watching the performances of *La Source* and *Nutcracker* I began to understand the close link between the school and company. I could see how the ‘coltish’ suppleness of the students strengthened with the repertoire as they moved through the company, allowing them to maintain the

lovely simplicity and effortlessness with which they move. The school does not seem to be focused on producing a 'finished' dancer but rather, a well-trained, flexible of mind and body, artistically hungry dancer, ready to explore and be moulded and developed throughout their professional career.

History, lineage, cultural validity, passion, organic movement and absence of tension, simplicity, virtuosity, batterie, foot articulation, desire

POB currently makes an osteopath available to the dancers for treatments a few times a week, but Benjamin Millepied plans to extend the medical and rehabilitation support into a larger, more comprehensive team for the 154 dancers. This reflects his desire to support the dancers in being as fit and healthy as possible to manage the requirements of a broadening repertoire. I will follow this development with great interest. Due to the large number of dancers and with two seasons always running concurrently in two theatres, classes are offered at various times of the day to support the needs of the dancers and their various schedules. Since returning, I have implemented a new system in TAB's rehabilitation and coaching schedule that offers different class times and duration to best accommodate the needs of the dancers as their schedule fluctuates. This has been very well received.

London

Royal Ballet (RB) Royal Ballet School (RBS) English National Ballet (ENB)

Arriving at the RB and RBS was a bit like coming home. There are many similarities between our organisations. Although there are quite a few international dancers in RB, it generally has a similar 'look' to TAB. The classes I observed were similarly focused and constructed, but with more virtuosity for the male dancers at the end of class, much like POB with steps such as various *grand pirouettes*, *manege* and *barrel jumps*.

Again, virtuosity

My visit was hosted by physiotherapist Moira McCormack. The RB have a comprehensive medical team to support the dancers, which functions similarly to ours. Thanks to a recent injection of funds, the RB's medical area has been renovated to include a separate gymnasium, Pilates room, physiotherapy room, doctor's consulting room, an in situ force plate and a dedicated dance rehabilitation studio. This expansion also included extra equipment and an expanded strength and conditioning program. I was extremely envious of the rehab studio because it alleviates all sorts of scheduling problems encountered when sharing studios with rehearsals and allows maximum access for the dancers. Their new strength training program would not be possible without unlimited daily access to the gym equipment which allows dancers to tailor their workouts around their individual schedule. They have just begun using a database program called SmartaBase, which they plan to use to help them collate fitness and strength data. Ultimately it could be used to compare dance fitness measures with injury trends. As TAB has a very similar repertoire it will be interesting to see the data they produce in coming years. Since my visit, TAB have shared twenty years of injury data and compared current physical measures with RB, demonstrating interesting trends and outcomes of preventative programs. Both companies plan to continue this information sharing in the future.

The highlight of my time with RB was meeting rehabilitation coach Ursula Hageli. She is the only other person I met who works exclusively in the ballet rehab area, supported by artistic and medical teams. Ursula's performing career spans over 30 years and includes most of the ballerina roles in the classical repertoire. She was also Ballet Mistress with RB for 8 years. In talking to her about our approaches to rehab and our experiences with different injuries and dancers, I was reminded how crucially important it is for teachers to be able to discuss our findings and share our ideas, keeping our eyes and inspiration fresh and invigorated.

Virtuosity, communication, mentorship, collegiality

Injury and rehabilitation is usually a delicate time in a dancer's life, with great responsibility placed on the coach in terms of the technical aspects and working with a dancer when they are feeling vulnerable. Technically, dancers can build their 'dancer identity' through years of using short cuts, substitution strategies and cheating, which over time leads to weakness and injury. It can be quite confronting to strip this back and rebuild – especially with an experienced dancer. Ursula's philosophy strengthened my belief that this is often necessary – even with an experienced dancer. She addressed problems such as the use of *over-turnout* from the lower legs, tucking the pelvis, leaning back and 'fishing' the ankles to achieve a line. It was fascinating to watch her work with an experienced principal artist over three days and to see how she gently built up trust between them, which allowed the dancer to gain confidence in dancing again. Her manner is calm and supportive but she is also firm and insistent. When coaching one of the soloist men who had just begun jumping again, she did a lot of work in eccentric control i.e. lowering slowly from *demi-pointe* into *grand poses* and *pirouettes* to open positions to prepare for landing *allegro* into *grand poses*. She worked a lot in the *a la seconde* position and *grand temps lié decoté* to prepare for *grand pirouettes* that he was working towards in the following week.

Whilst watching my first class at the RB one of the principal dancers introduced himself as a friend of one of TAB's former dancers, expressing his interest in our calf rise program because we had "helped his friend" during his time in Australia. There were so many things on this trip that made me feel

connected to the wider, international dance community. We often feel so isolated in Australia but we can hold our heads high and feel very much a part of the world stage. It was valuable to be reminded about how connected we are. Upon returning home I feel so buoyed by these experiences and proud to have witnessed Australia's relevance and leadership.

Virtuosity, communication, mentorship, collegiality, self-belief, cultural pride

I was fortunate to see the RB in two performances. The first was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (choreographer Wheeldon) and then *Don Quixote* (choreographer Acosta after Petipa). *Alice's Adventures* was superbly danced and reads more like a pantomime ballet, with its exquisite set and costume designs. This would be a great production for our company as we have so many wonderful artists who love the challenge of a good character!

Whitelodge

My visit to Whitelodge was hosted by ex-Australian Ballet dancer, Mark Annear, who is currently Head of Outreach and Teacher Training at RBS. Whitelodge is the Lower School of RBS and a former Royal hunting lodge, situated in Richmond Park, on the south-western outskirts of London. It is also the estate where Queen Elizabeth II was born and is shown as her birthplace on her birth certificate. It offers a 5-year course from ages 11 to 16 after which selected students progress to the Upper School, situated in London, opposite the Royal Opera House. The Upper School is a 3-year course.

Whitelodge is a boarding school with beautiful studios and accommodation facilities including gymnasium/Pilates room, physiotherapy suite and a swimming pool to support the dancers' health and welfare. It also boasts a studio that can be converted into a theatrette. While I was there it was in 'theatre mode' and the students were doing a dress rehearsal for their annual choreographic competition. This is one of the most important events on the school calendar and has played a major role in the development of choreographers such as Christopher Wheeldon and Liam Scarlett who now create works for major international ballet companies. It was so inspiring to see the enthusiasm of the students, but even more so the nurturing and mentoring offered by all of the teaching staff who were helping to bring these fresh new works to life.

Upper School

The Upper School is an international school with students from various countries as well as Great Britain. The training and management of the students is not dissimilar to the ABS and everything I viewed was in step with what we do in Australia. The students have a compact medical team looking after them; physiotherapist, doctor and Pilates instructor. This team communicates with the teachers regularly to manage the student's needs. As I had observed in New York and Paris, one difference to Australia was their dedicated gymnasium/Pilates room, which had a substantial amount of equipment and was accessible to the students throughout each day. In contrast, the students of the ABS and dancers of TAB share their gymnasium/Pilates space and each have limited access hours at different times of the day.

While I was there, I watched a second and third year class as well as a pas de deux class. I was fortunate to meet with Nicola Tranah, the graduate class teacher who also gives a rehabilitation class once per week. This class consists of a floor barre, loosely following the basic movements of a standing barre. It makes up part of an injured student's rehab plan and gives them an opportunity to explore these movements in an alternative way. Students are referred to this class via the physiotherapist. There are three different rehabilitation classes set into the schedule per week, given by various members of the teaching staff.

Nicola and I spent time discussing some basic alignment issues such as the exaggerated 'fished' ankle which disrupts alignment and optimal functional turnout of the hip and can lead to weakness and injury. Whatever the amount of rotation or angle that a dancer works with at the ankle, this joint should not be compressed and should be controlled and supported from the hip joint. The problem with focusing solely on the line of the ankle as a separate entity is that the other important issues

relating to lumbo-pelvic control, strength of external hip rotation, alignment, weight placement, power and locomotion are missed.

ENB

Another highlight was visiting English National Ballet and seeing Alina Cojocar perform *Sugar Plum Fairy* in their production of *Nutcracker*. This is not usually a role that moves an audience emotionally, but Alina's interpretation was absolutely sublime. I have never seen anyone perform a traditional classical variation with such fluidity, such seamlessness. It was as if she were dancing a different language or not dancing at all – just communicating. I was not aware of any steps or my eye drawn to conventional shapes or lines. Her musicality and co-ordination afforded her such a seamless movement quality that she took my breath away. If this is something we can all work towards, then it's worth every moment. I would very much like to cultivate these qualities in our dancers and I think it's an excellent example of the culmination of elements I had observed on my trip thus far.

Virtuosity, communication, mentorship, collegiality, self-belief, cultural pride, musicality, phrasing, co-ordination, fearlessness

ENB is the only other touring company in the world that performs as much as TAB and with a similar amount of company members. There is a palpable feeling of competition and striving for excellence in this company. This is led by Principal Artist and Artistic Director, Tamara Rojo, not only in her vision for the company but in her continued participation in daily class and performances. She is an incredible dancer, regularly doing up to 5 and 6 pirouettes on pointe in every class plus consecutive grand pirouettes in 2nd on pointe. I watched her rehearse *Black Swan* and *Sugar Plum* with incredible conviction, artistry and technique before returning to her office to attend to administrative duties. So inspiring. Tamara is committed to dancer health and fitness and ensuring her dancers are physically capable of their demanding repertoire and schedule. ENB have a separate gymnasium and Pilates studio at their headquarters in London.

Russia

Moscow Bolshoi Ballet (BB)

Russia was the most culturally interesting of all the countries I visited. It was coming up to New Year's Eve, which is one of the most important celebrations of the year. There were Christmas markets everywhere and even a playground made entirely out of ice. Nearly five weeks earlier, in New York, I was excited to experience some light snow flutters ... now I was up to my knees in soft, fresh snow in minus 17 degrees. Russia is not set up for tourists the way other countries are, hence no English subtitles on any signs or in shops. I had recently enjoyed being immersed in the French language during my week in Paris and had imposed my poor French on anyone who would listen. Moscow was the first time I felt like an outsider.

Fortunately, I was given a warm welcome to the BB by Executive Director Maria Frolova and General Manager Anton Getman who both spoke wonderful English. Maria immediately took me on a tour of the offices, studios and theatre and looked after me brilliantly all week.

The Bolshoi is big in name and stature – it's an absolute rabbit-warren backstage and I got lost many times that week. Halfway through my tour, Maria took me through a door saying that she "thought I would like this" and suddenly we were standing in the top tier of the theatre's auditorium, practically in line with the massive chandelier! I was suddenly overcome by the history, the grandeur and the privilege of being there on this trip ... and promptly burst into tears! (I had a few of those moments in Russia). Later, I also had the chance to go onto that immense stage ... one of so many incredibly inspirational memories from this trip.

The stage was refurbished around 2009 including the mechanics to change the floor from being raked or flat according to the needs of the performance. Most of the studios have the same 4-degree rake as the stage. In addition to this, there is an 'Upper Stage' that sits directly above the main stage and is the same size, including orchestra pit, and is used for rehearsals. At the back of the main stage is, again, a similarly sized space used for loading sets/costumes etc but can also be opened up to become what must be the biggest stage in the world. In 2012, they opened a new theatre on the other side of the road, which is where most visiting contemporary companies perform.

There are well over 200 dancers in the company, giving approximately 450 performances a year. This is made possible by their ability to run concurrent seasons at the Bolshoi Theatre, the New Theatre and also to have part of the company away on tour.

To accommodate the large number of dancers there are up to 6 classes running on most mornings. Each class is of 1 hour duration with very simple exercise construction. I watched class everyday and was fascinated to see that they almost all followed exactly the same order and construction, especially in the centre – *adage, tendu, fondu, grand battement, sautés, echappé, assemblé, jeté, sissones, grand allegro, virtuosity*. As in Paris, I felt a strong connection between teacher and pianist in terms of style and tempi. There was some incredible playing – I've never heard Stravinsky's *Petroushka* for *tendus*! And the very next piece was a Katie Perry song!

In general, class felt more like a gentle wake up for the day's rehearsals rather than to continue training and developing and not many corrections were given. These bodies are highly trained and designed to dance. In general, the joint mobility and muscle flexibility is such that the body moves through the motions freely and without tension. The continued improvement and development happens in rehearsal. Dancers who are given featured roles are designated a coach with whom they will work closely for (usually) their whole career. In contrast, TAB's classes are 1.25 hrs duration and are designed to give every dancer the opportunity to continue strengthening and developing their technique with many corrections given. Centre exercises are often repeated once so that dancers have an opportunity to apply these corrections.

I was fascinated to watch Daria Khokhlova coached by Nina Semizorova and Artemiy Belyakov coached by Alexendr Vetrov in the *Nutcracker pas de deux*. There is a devilishly difficult section in the *Sugar*

Plum variation and Daria and Nina stayed back for a long time afterwards perfecting it. Daria is an up-and-coming soloist. She works intelligently and has a very clean technique. She doesn't forgo the purity of the movement for gymnastic extensions when they are not required. It was so interesting to see them work together in class the next morning. There was clearly much mutual respect and confidence in this relationship.

Purity

That night I watched a performance of *Nutcracker* and experienced that beautiful Tchaikovsky score the way it was meant to be heard. The acoustics are extraordinary and the orchestra pit is so large and open that the music just washes over you in huge waves. It was an absolutely incredible experience.

Next morning I met with Ludmila Semenyaka after watching her teach class. She trained at the Vaganova Academy in Nina Belikova's class who was taught by Madame Vaganova. She was also a ballerina at BB before joining ENB in London. During her time at the BB Ludmila used to do daily class with Asaf Messerer, whom she said taught her how to jump by constructing class based on a few certain *allegro* steps (*ballonné, cabriole, jeté*) that he would gradually work towards. She called him a Master because he taught in a "medical" way, and "understood how the body works". He would tell his dancers "you only have two knees!" by which he meant work with alignment and placement as it relates to your body. I understood her to mean that he taught from an anatomical point of view and promoted good alignment and posture over what is now becoming an increasing trend of extreme gymnastic extensions. She had less external hip rotation in her right hip so had to learn how to work intelligently with her body and its parameters which is why she enjoyed working with Messerer's "intelligent" approach. The incredible joint mobility that many of the current dancers have gives rise to extreme movements, which can lead to laxity and weakness if not supported by good posture and alignment. The injury rate here is anecdotally quite high, but it is such a big company with a large number of dancers in reserve that the need for preservation and injury prevention is not the same as we have in Australia where the pool of highly trained ballet dancers is much smaller.

Purity, mobility, respect for anatomical individuality

In terms of injury management, the dancers of the BB have a general check up with a specialist doctor every six months including CT scans and in the case of injury, the BB covers the financial cost of a dancer's rehabilitation. In the meantime, the dancers are expected to self-manage and report any injury issues. They have a gym/Pilates room but it is not heavily patronised and it's mainly the younger dancers who use it. One of the dancers, Evgenia Obraztsova, was rehearsing *Tatiana* (from *Onegin*) while I was there. She had been off for most of the year with surgery on both knees and returned to the studio in September. They chose the role of *Tatiana* for her return to the stage as it is not as technically demanding as other repertoire and therefore a good vehicle to regain performance confidence.

The Bolshoi Ballet Academy is the feeder school for the company and this season twelve dancers have been offered contracts. Next season they will have many more positions available due to a large number of dancers retiring and will likely hold an open audition, available to all dancers. There are many good schools throughout Russia now. Much like POB, the links between school and company are obvious in terms of training but at the BB there is also a strong star system and they work together to identify and develop dancers up to two years before they graduate. These students are assigned a company coach while they finish their training and are allowed to attend company class and receive specialist coaching during this time.

Historically, it is well known that the selection process for the major schools in Russia is quite stringent and they adhere strictly to their criteria of body shape, flexibility, mobility, proportions, musicality and artistic instinct. In Australia we do not have the same vast selection pool and we have a wider variety of body types which gives us wonderful diversity, depth and character. It is crucial that the ABS and TAB continue their work in engaging, developing and nurturing relationships with ballet teachers and

schools around the country to ensure we identify and develop the best talent available for the promotion and advancement of ballet in Australia and our unique Australian style.

St Petersburg

By the time I arrived in St Petersburg, I felt much more confident with my Russian (I now had a total of three words!) and was catching the local bus around the city. I was received very warmly and was chaperoned throughout the week by Assistant to the Artistic Director Sonya Yadchenko.

There were many highlights with the Mariinsky company, which runs very similarly to the BB. One of which was meeting Xander Parish, an English dancer formerly with the RB, who was celebrating his 5th year with Mariinsky. He is the first ever British dancer to join the Mariinsky and his story is an incredible tale of courage and determination. He gave me some wonderful insights about this amazing company.

As with BB and POB, the dancers who are given featured roles are given a designated coach and Xander talked about how important that individual support has been for him. Any dancer would agree with this, but he didn't speak so much about the technique, discipline and pressure. Instead, he expressed more about feeling supported and encouraged. This is very personal – his coach is sometimes in the wings during a performance spurring him on. The relationship between coach and dancer differs depending on personalities and styles but it is always a very powerful association. The responsibility is shared but it is important to be reminded of the insecurity and pressure that dancers put on themselves and the positive or negative impact a coach can have on that dancer's development. During my trip I saw various approaches, some were very close and familiar, some much more business-like and all were incredibly respectful of each other but more importantly, of the art form itself.

Whatever the level of personal affection, best results come from a supportive environment, where a dancer can explore, experiment and even fail. Positive and constructive words and gestures should be used to communicate ideas and corrections and to promote respectful and reciprocal communication.

Coaching is a responsibility and a privilege, an art form in itself, an intimate journey

I was so fortunate that the company was rehearsing and performing *Swan Lake* during that week. To see them do the most iconic work in the classical repertoire was a real thrill. I watched a few *corps de ballet swan* rehearsals of Act 2 and 4. I have never seen such unison in a rehearsal before. Every arm making the same shape, at the same time, like they were breathing together. In addition to the training and similar body types, this also comes from the way the performance repertoire is set up. It's a 'rolling' repertoire, meaning that the big works come back regularly every few months, so the big traditional ballets become as much a part of the dancer as daily class. During performances, the swans stay on stage after Act 2 and 4 to receive notes directly from the Artistic Director before returning to their dressing rooms. In terms of upper body, they really did make the most beautiful 1st position of the arms I have ever seen. No tension in the backs, the upper arms gently suspended in front, creating a forward circular continuation of the rib cage. The arms and back were in unison as they moved through the position or moved whilst holding the 1st position. It seems like a small detail but the beauty and purity of such a basic element is one of the foundations of the classical technique.

The other notable thing in watching *Swan Lake* was the lack of tension in the dancers' necks. Instead, they used the full length of their spine to represent the swan's neck and mainly through the lower back, leaving their necks and arms free to be expressive and create shapes. Since returning, I have experimented with using the cue to "feel a length or reach" through the lower back instead of through the neck and head, especially in *allegro*. This has improved some of the dancers' movements and reduced the amount of tension used in the neck and shoulders.

Coaching is a responsibility and a privilege, the journey is intimate, an art form in itself, purity, pride, knowledge, lack of tension

Throughout the many classes I watched in Russia I was interested to see that only a small number of the female dancers wore pointe shoes in class and then some put them on at the end for pointe work

(same as POB). In Australia, many of our female company dancers wear pointe shoes in class everyday. This is an important element in developing strength and articulation. I believe it is also important to make a choice about when and how often to wear pointe shoes in class. If pointe shoes are worn habitually, a dancer's sense of 'contact' with the floor and sensitivity through the feet can be diminished and tension can develop from the feet into the legs, especially if they don't have a naturally deep *demi-plié*.

And now we arrive at another emotional moment on this trip ... Yekatarina Kondourova. If watching *Swan Lake* at the Mariinsky wasn't already special enough, then watching Yekaterina rehearse *Dying Swan* is something I will never forget. A lesson in purity and nuance. No tension, no pushing, just going inside the movement, beginning with a thought and giving breath and life to that thought, rather than manipulating the body into a shape. Art in motion. She found the perfect balance between vulnerability and strength. I watched her in class and rehearsals many times that week and admired her intelligence and humble artistry.

The Mariinsky dancers have access to a doctor who comes on site a few times a week to assist with anything from the flu to advice on injury management. There is also a sports therapy centre and gymnasium nearby for conditioning work and massage.

Vaganova Ballet Academy & Museum

On my second last day in St Petersburg I visited the Vaganova Academy and was given a private tour of the Vaganova Museum. The sense of history, creation and excellence is almost overwhelming in this museum. Nijinsky's original *Spectre de la Rose* costume plus two of his own paintings, Ulanova's *Odette* headpiece, Pavlova's make up box and so much more. The students here, as in Paris, can't help but be inspired by the history that surrounds them. History gives us standards, markers, inspiration and counter points to our own artistic journey. It made me think about our own history and how we currently share and promote it and whether we can do that better.

The Australian Ballet and Australian Ballet School are young organisations in comparison to the Mariinsky's nearly 280 years, but during our more than 50-year history we have built an enviable, international reputation for excellence and creativity. It is a history we should be proud of and which should be accessible and celebrated by all Australians. I often find that our students don't know about the wonderful dancers Australia has produced. Lineage informs us, gives us a base line, makes us who we are, gives us respect for what's gone before and a starting point on our artistic compass from which to jump from or journey along. I think there is some work to be done in helping to keep our history alive.

The students of the Vaganova Academy were busy all week performing in their season of *Nutcracker* so I was very fortunate to be able to watch the level 4 & 5's in class before one of the performances. It is the same production as Mariinsky. The students all danced beautifully, particularly Anastasia Lukina as *Sugar Plum*, a talented dancer with a very strong future. She will join Mariinsky later in the year.

It was fascinating to see the Mariinsky's production of *Nutcracker* at the end of my trip after beginning 7 weeks earlier with Balanchine's NYCB production in New York. Looking back, I can now see so much of Balanchine's Russian heritage in his creation for NYCB. This inspired me to reflect on Graeme Murphy's production of *Nutcracker* for TAB and his references to the Ballet Russes and Australia's Russian ballet heritage. I feel like I have come full circle on an incredible journey and experienced a genuine, international connection.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It would be impossible to overestimate the enormous impact this trip has had on me both personally and professionally. The opportunities and experiences that were made available to me were above and beyond my expectations. The privilege to view the 'big picture' through some of the world's most revered schools and companies has given me a fresh perspective on how to best guide and train Australia's current and future students and company dancers. These observations have given me an invaluable opportunity to question and reflect upon my beliefs and practices related to the various phases in the development and career of a dancer.

I have returned with renewed faith and respect for the talent and commitment of the ABS and TAB medical and artistic teams who educate, support and care for our dancers. Our standards are extremely high, so high in fact that we sometimes neglect to acknowledge each other's achievements and expertise. I would like to foster a culture of celebrating excellence when it is demonstrated and promote respect and pride in our work. Believing in ourselves does not mean we are smug. It means we are enjoying our work with a positivity that is conducive to further development.

Injury prevention programs – sharing knowledge, creating and maintaining connections

During my trip, I encountered such interest and respect for TAB's injury prevention initiatives such as the calf rise program and its role in reducing lower leg injuries that I believe we should share that story and relevant information on both TAB and ABS websites for the benefit of the wider dance community. Since returning home I have begun working on this project.

Facilities

The TAB and ABS share beautiful premises at the Primrose Potter Australian Ballet Centre, however both organisations have grown and their programs have developed over the past nearly 30 years since we moved into these premises. The students and company dancers still share access to one gymnasium and Pilates room. Out of the seven companies I visited, four have their own gymnasium and Pilates room and two are currently expanding and renovating. All four schools have their own space. Considering our acknowledged level of expertise and commitment to dancer health and welfare, I believe even more could be achieved with distinct space available to each organisation so that access could be tailored to the needs and schedules of the individual dancer as happens in similar international organisations. I acknowledge pressures relating to finance and space constraints, however I believe an expansion in this area for TAB and ABS would be a valuable and important use of scarce resources.

Technique training, coaching, rehabilitation

Through the observations made during this trip, I believe that the ABS provides world-class training for vocational students, implemented by highly skilled, talented and committed teachers and staff. Our strength is in the depth and breadth of our knowledge base, passion for creativity and excellence and a thirst for learning and developing. I feel inspired by the lively and insightful discussions that I have had with my colleagues about my observations from this trip and I thank them for their support and encouragement. It is imperative that the ABS continue to invigorate ways to nurture our close links with ballet teachers and schools around the country through education sharing, outreach programs and teacher recognition to help identify and develop Australia's most talented students.

The Australian Ballet is a major international ballet company with a proven record for excellence and success both here and abroad and this became more and more evident during my trip. We perform as diverse a range of traditional classical and contemporary repertoire as any of the major companies I visited. We are courageous enough to put our unique Australian stamp on classics such as Graeme Murphy's *Swan Lake* and *Nutcracker* and we have a strong history of encouraging and promoting new choreographers for the development of the art form. We are world leaders in dancer injury management and prevention and proactively support what is a relatively small pool of highly trained

dancers in relation to the demands of a diverse repertoire and rigorous touring schedule. We must continue our commitment to developing and supporting the needs of each individual dancer while not 'losing the dance in the detail', but finding movement through knowledge.

The following conclusions and recommendations highlight ways in which we can achieve this in relation to the training, coaching and rehabilitation of ABS students and the professional dancers of TAB.

Training speed, co-ordination

- the need to develop speed and clarity in footwork and *batterie* which relates to having pelvis on top of feet not behind, using the hips and legs to alight, not just pushing from the feet, and regularly giving a variety of speeds in class and ensuring an adequate amount of 'one-foot-to-one-foot work';
- paying attention to the timing of *port de bras* happening just ahead of legs to develop co-ordination, promoting a full and relaxed use of *demi-plié*;

Training weight transference

- refining transference of weight by releasing directly down into *demi-plié* during transitions (ie. coupé and tombé) and being on one leg, (not between two), staying in *demi-plié* longer and deeper before initiating locomotion from the pelvis not from the feet;

Simplicity and freedom

- the benefits of simplifying exercise construction;
- promoting an organic, broad and free sense of *port de bras* which relates to freeing up the thoracic spine and rib cage and using the full length of the back;

Training musicality

- raising awareness of musicality and phrasing and communicating clearly with pianists. This includes ensuring the use of different speeds throughout allegro i.e. the difference between *petit*, *medium* and *grand*. It also includes encouraging dancers to explore their musicality and make choices about phrasing;

Class time management

- the need to continue training *virtuosity* in the company for strength and confidence. This relates to time management in company class but it would also be ideal when possible to extend class time from 1.25hrs to 1.5hrs to allow for this, especially on days when only one class is offered;
- offering company dancers a range of classes to accommodate fluctuations in schedule and supporting different phases in an individual's rehabilitation program;
- giving set *barres* in coaching classes to improve technical application and time management

Developing young dancers

- considering the use of *variations*, based on class work, for ABS upper levels assessments instead of centre exercises to promote the appreciation of technique as the vehicle for artistic expression thereby developing flow, freedom and performance confidence.

Injury rehabilitation

- balancing the application of dance science medicine with the aesthetic requirements of ballet and a dancer's artistic sensibility during rehabilitation;
- purchasing a *Parasetter* and implementing Marika Molnar's floor based work into early rehabilitation work for dancers' who have a period of 'non-weight bearing';

Teacher collegiality and mentorship

In my experience, teaching can feel lonely at times as we squirrel away in the studio with our dancers, ideas and beliefs. I was so inspired by the openness of so many teachers and coaches and their confidence in sharing ideas about the art of teaching. I would love to promote and encourage this back home. During one of my presentations since returning, I was able to develop the meeting into an open discussion where teachers were presenting their ideas and influences and we were able to draw and discuss comparisons with my information. It became an enriching conversation in so many ways (and a much longer meeting than anticipated!). I often give classes for dance organisations who invite their teachers to watch for their professional development. In the future I would like to make this more interactive and meaningful by offering workshops for teachers. In 2014, TAB successfully ran a pilot program entitled Practical Placement in Body Conditioning and Technique Coaching, which allowed the participant to spend one week of observation and practical work in the area of dance rehabilitation and training. I would like to develop a similar program specifically for dance teachers with a view to them receiving credit in teacher training courses.

I recommend that TAB bring guest teacher, Monique Loudières to Australia to share her knowledge and inspire and educate our dancers and artistic staff.

History, lineage, pride, cultural validity

Visiting European companies and schools in cities like London, Paris and Russia with their long and influential cultural and ballet history highlighted the lack of our historical presence back home. We have so many achievements to be proud of in our comparatively short history and I think we can do a better job in keeping that history alive for the dancers of today. I think our dancers would have a richer and deeper appreciation of their place, and therefore pride, if they could view themselves in a wider and clearer context. Not only in general ballet history, but in our Australian Ballet history. I think the pride and confidence that I felt in other environments could, in part, be related to a better understanding of what and who has gone before and in whose footsteps they tread. I plan to investigate this further by looking into the management and use of archive material and exploring current practice of and future opportunities for the delivery of ballet history subjects to ABS students.

Dissemination

I have had the opportunity to deliver my findings through meetings and presentations to the Director and staff of both TAB and the ABS. I have been invited to make a presentation to the Board of the ABS in the coming months. I am sharing and implementing my findings to the current and future generations of dancers through my classes and coaching sessions in both organisations. Other avenues include regional and national guest teaching engagements, public education programs and external training programs through TAB, ABS, and various media opportunities including dance specific publications and websites.