

## **Dance Department History Project 2010-2011**

### **Transcribed interview of Pat Debenham on November 29, 2010 Interviewed by Susanne Johnson Davis**

I attended my undergraduate school here at BYU, went on a mission for two years, and danced with the International Folk dancers. People are always surprised to hear I was with the folk dancers for five years; those were some of the grandest experiences of my life.

I consider myself to have two mentors. Mary Bee was one and Dee Winterton was the other. Those are two people who impacted my life professionally and personally. Particularly Dee affected my life probably more than any other person in my life. He was a brother, father figure, a confidant, the person I learned stuff from professionally, and he would slap me around when I needed it (not physically).

He would say, "You know, you got to get it together." He was just a grand individual.

For graduate school, I went to UCLA. I was there for a year and a half from 1974 to '76. I went away and actually had one year of graduate school at BYU. I decided Leona Holbrook was too tough of a thesis chair, and that I might want to go somewhere else if I wanted to survive.

That's not totally true; by that time, Dee told me that I ought to get a graduate degree from somewhere else other than BYU because, "We want you to have some breadth and I would like to see you come back. I'm not guaranteeing you that there will be a position, but it would be best if you go away."

He told me UCLA and then later on told me he didn't mean UCLA, but another one in San Francisco. He said he was supposed to send me to *that* school. But UCLA was a great place for me to be at it. It was a good time. They had me in the junior class before I got there because this was the time before video taping and they could say okay, this is who I am and put yourself on video.

They signed me up to teach beginning modern dance classes. I was a paid graduate student. They were going to make me pay out-of-state tuition, but I told them it was too much too me. They waived that and I got a stock while I was there because I was teaching. I performed on their performing dance company once they saw what I could do; they moved me up in the classes. It was a great couple years. While there, I performed with the Moving Company, a semi-professional company. We toured California and did residencies in schools and performed in pavilions, many in Northern and Southern California.

I had some really important experiences at UCLA. As I said, Dee sent me a way, but he wasn't guaranteeing that BYU would have a position, or what that position would be like. The University of Utah also had a position at the same time. I was offered a position there and here. The University of Utah offered me \$13,000—that wouldn't get you so far today, that is for sure. Phyllis Jacobsen, the chair of Women's PE, which is where dance was, offered me between \$9,000 and \$10,000. I went to Dean Clayne Jensen and told him I had the opportunity to make more money there than I would here.

"Why would I want to come here?"

He told me he had talked to Phyllis about this before she was to issue a contract, and she was supposed to start at \$11,000. It was interesting what my relationship was with Phyllis, and I don't know that I would go into those details at this moment, but it was an interesting relationship.

I came to BYU in 1976, and I decided on BYU because I had promised Dee and I had paid for my own graduate school. It wasn't like BYU sent me away to go elsewhere. I think I felt a commitment to the university, my alma mater. I wanted to be here and a part of what was going on here. It was great for the first ten years and it was really fabulous. We would laugh a lot, play a lot, and then it became more complicated, which is another story.

### **Professors and Peers at BYU**

Dee Winterton, of course was one of my professors. Joy Stuffy was one of my professors, and Helen Beeman was one of the most significant people I had as an instructor. I didn't have many classes from her, but I had my dance pedagogy class, 366, I think. We learned in that class how to teach modern dance. She was very encouraging. Chris Allerton was also one of my faculty members. I had my children's

methods class from her. That began a life-long journey of working with children and just loving Chris. She and her husband are in Greece on their mission, and they think it is a great thing to do. I love Chris; she is like a mother to me. She has been quite influential to me and my wife Kathy.

Kathy, my wife, served as Chris's assistant for twenty to twenty-five years during the time Kathy was here as a faculty member. Until we had our children, we taught and choreographed major pieces for the children's program. It organized a big theme concert. Jabberwocky was one of them. It was originally done in Dancers' Company with Dee. He and I did it in Nile Steiner's basement and Nile was the composer—pre-electronic music like we can today make with garage band.

We had pieces of tape that we put up on the wall all over the place. It was a complicated but good process. Kathy and I, and Chris also, produced "There's A Train Going By My Window." There were two or three other ones that we did with big major theme concerts.

Chris Allerton was fabulous; Dee Winterton, a great mentor; Mary Bee, again the five years I spent with the folk dancers was a great time. For some reason, I remember when we toured in Europe, she somehow got her head stuck between the bed and the wall. We had to go rescue her. Jimmy was on the tour with us, which was fun. Mary Bee is a phenomenal force in the world. Always has been and still is, thankfully.

Leona Holbrook was one of my professors in the graduate programs. I did a year of graduate programs before I went away. I wasn't a dance major until my senior year, although I was a dance minor and a recreational major.

When it turned out I had to do eight hours of internship in the recreational program dealing with snotty nosed kids, I said "I'm not going to do that! I am going to be a dance major!"

I went home and told my dad and he said "No. You are not."

I said "Yes I am," and he told me he wasn't going to pay for it. I told him I needed to quit school, make money and then go back. This was Christmas time during my senior year, and it would have extended my time at BYU for a little bit.

He came back and he said, "You know, let's just get you out of school," and he finished paying for my school. I worked as well—had a job on campus and worked during the summers.

Some peers: Paullene Katcher; Jill, I forget her last name, she is down at UVU; Doris Hunstman Tohero, I think she was with Ryan Woodbury. She came to BYU after joining the Church because of her association with Dee Winterton, who also danced under Ryan Woodbury. And of course, my wife. We danced together; we were in classes together with Cathy Black. Cathy Black in terms of instructors (somehow I missed her) came in 1972 and she and I actually dated, but that is another story. That is in the days before now, where we think dating your students would be next to impossible. She and I dated, and didn't work out, but she ended up marrying a fabulous person.

I married Kathy Parsons and we have three marvelous children and seven grandchildren. She is now associate academic vice president at UVU. She is much more intelligent than I am. Actually, she does everything better than I did.

So Cathy was one of my peers. Hyrum Conrad was in international folk dance, we were peers together, and he is up at BYU-Idaho teaching theatre now. Becky Ellis made a huge impact on the children's program, particularly with boys in dance. Dee Winterton, I think the two of us may have started the boys' program, I don't remember. But when I was a graduate student at BYU, Dee would often go with Ryan Woodbury and he had me teaching the children's program out here. Gigi Arrington, came through our program. She has been working with Ryan Woodbury in the education program. She performed for seven or eight years. She is now out doing great things in Salt Lake.

Let me see who else. Becky Ellis also got a doctorate degree, which I think is amazing. Sara Lee Gibb for me was not as influential as she was with other people. I didn't really interact with her as much. She was part-time at the time. I think she and Dave moved to the middle of Utah to do a car dealership and then came back again. As a student, she wasn't influential with who I was and in my development, although she may have been for my wife, Kathy; I'm not sure if Kathy had classes with her. During the time we were going to school, Sara Lee was pretty much out of the picture with family and making sure she was taking care of those things. I think she started to get in the picture more the longer I was here.

## **Administrators**

Leona was chair of Women's P.E.; she was also the chair of graduate studies, although I don't know if she was for Women's P.E. Phyllis Jacobsen was department chair for approximately twenty years from the beginning of the dance department, because I was hired in the dance department when it was still under women's education which then became the dance department.

Of course Dee Winterton was a division administrator, Sara Lee a division administrator, and Cathy Black a division administrator. I was division administrator—I associated with myself, I think. Pam Musil is now presently division administrator. Sara Lee went on to be the department chair, and then it was Lee Wakefield. Those are the administrators during my time at BYU. I think obviously Clayne Jensen was a huge supporter of dance during his time as dean. I think he had an opportunity to have the most impact as dean in relation to who we are as BYU's dance.

Obviously, Sara Lee made an impact. I think by the time Sara Lee was dean, I don't know that she was able to make any significant inroads for dance because I think dance had been pretty well established at the university. I think she was certainly involved in education at BYU, the general education program that was really important. I think by the time she became dean, the university was so structured, it was hard to change initiatives. I think dance was already pretty well established and she tried to make sure we were still a voice on campus, which was important.

## **Student Years**

I don't even remember what happened yesterday, let alone when I was a student. I just know it was an exciting time—a time of growth for me. When I was in the dorms my first couple of years, there were lots of artistic students involved in theatre and dance. I was involved with the homecoming assembly and had the opportunity to dance, sing, and act and be Huckleberry Finn in the big homecoming produced play that we did for the students in the SFH. It was a great time. The people were exciting, there was so much growth and new opportunities that came into me.

I remember auditioning for the International Folk Dance in the Smith Family Living Center. They had a ballroom that has since disappeared. In that room, I saw the folk dancers in the beginning of the year in their booths around campus in the Wilk asking to come and join. I had always been interested in dance, but I had never really done anything with it. I saw this and thought it might be interesting. I went and I specifically remember this: we were in a circle during the men's part of the audition. There was this guy on the other side that really stuck out his chest and I thought I could do that. I mimicked his behavior and I was chosen to be a folk dancer. If I'm not mistaken, I think I was put in the highest class, and if not, it was the lower class, but the next semester I was moved up.

From the beginning, I was with the best dancers and I remember seeing people who were already folk dancers and thinking, Oh! John!—the club president, the good-looking Nordic good guy! I think he married the blond homecoming queen. There were several folk dancers that were homecoming queen. I remember looking up to those guys, thinking they were so neat and wanting to be like them because they got to do the cool dances. I had to do just ten of them.

One of the things that is in some ways, in my own sense of what it is to be on the tour team, is to be somewhat elitist. I really liked the fact that where we were. The tours for the summertime were a different group of performers than during the school year. I think part of the reason for that is because in order to tour, you had to have money. You could still be involved with all the guest choreographers and "good dances" for Christmas Around the World and be involved, but you didn't have to have money, which was good for me because I wouldn't have had the money to tour and couldn't be on the top team. So my time at BYU, I loved it.

## **Time as BYU Faculty**

I began teaching in 1976. I remember going to Brent Webb, the Academic Vice President, who interviewed me. I also had a General Authority interview, but I don't remember that one so much. I do remember Brent Webb sitting across the table from me. He was rather a rotund man, I think, or maybe it was someone different who was a round man.

Then he leaned forward and said that I should make sure the fat people feel good about themselves. I thought, *I don't really get this*. I understood later that he wanted to make sure everyone was included in dance in some way. I thought it was a very interesting counsel.

I started in 1976, and I was director of Dancer's Company at that time. Dee and I did it together for several years because of his influence and because it was fashioned over what he was doing. Kathy, my wife, was the person who started the company. She started it with her master's thesis in 1974 and '75. That was her master's project and she went and did residencies in Utah. By the time I came the company was doing things in California. We did everything with contacts Dee had, and none of it was set up through Performing Arts Management like it was with the other people.

We would go out and do residencies. There were two or three residencies. Twice in Hawaii, we did a whole tour from here to Florida and Puerto Rico and all that was done through residencies. One of the interesting things we did in Florida was work in an inner city school and at that time, we had eight men in the company; I think this relates to the story. We went into a rough school, an elementary school, did our teaching, lecture, and spent the two weeks there. At the end of the two weeks, it was interesting how the students changed in how they related to each other and particularly how they related, since half of them didn't have fathers. It was a racially mixed school. By the time we ended, the young men were father figures. The kids were sitting in their laps and it was so great to see how our students would relate to students because of their LDS background.

Dee was a huge influence at that time. He eventually left the dance department, moved up to the music department, he was also interested in theatre, in musicals, and in Young Ambassadors. He was the choreographer of the YA for a few years before becoming director. At that point, they had two directors: Randy Boothe did one and Dee would do the other. They would do all the big shows, but Randy did the music and Dee would be the choreographer.

Dee worked in theatre a lot, not any musicals but he did movement classes for theatre, and he was the person who shaped our Music Theatre major, the BFA, we have now. I didn't replace anybody.

I think I fell into dance and BYU, although I made the conscious decision. I think I have had opportunities throughout my life to be placed in situations that helped me grow both physically and mentally, professionally and spiritually. I think being at BYU I have been able to grow in ways because of the people I am around, particularly the students. The students have a spiritual dimension that feeds me all the time. I think that is a significant part of my experience at BYU.

I don't remember what my dreams were. I just came knowing that Dee—this is going to sound strange, but Dee was my dream. By that I mean he had a vision of dance that I bought into and that I thought was important and that it could happen here.

My dreams have been fulfilled in many ways: in the interest I have on many levels, a lot of what I want to do in my own life, and in things that I think are positive. In high priests yesterday, we were talking about faith. President Hinckley was such a man of faith. I mean all the prophets are but I think he was someone who was very positive in life. Other authorities are just about doctrine, but I think he had just simple, yet deep conviction that what we do in and through the church makes a positive way throughout the church. I think that is one of the things that our dance does.

For a long time, as a modern dancer, a serious dancer, even though I was a folk dancer, I had the sense that the reason that the folk dancers did what they did was because they smiled a lot. The other part in me eventually came to the place where I realized it's more than the smiles, but what was on the inside. The more I worked with students, the more I would understand that because of the lifestyle of what they lived and understood about the gospel, that physically translates into an experience on stage that transcends a smile or sweet spirit. There is something deep that we need to share that is almost intangible.

## **Contemporary Faculty Members**

I think you will be interviewing most of them. Once you are here, you are generally here forever. Gigi Arrington was here for a while; she was great. She was a great thinker of dance, and really believes in the gospel. Again she is working with Ryan Woodbury and doing positive things with dance in school and the ways to teach. I think that comes from her experience in working with Dee, and with Shirley and Joanne who are both master teachers.

Raymond Robinson is here and Becky Phillips. Both are important and significant contributors to our department who are now no longer here with us. Almost everybody else is. Kathy, my wife, was with the department for eighteen years and then went to UVU and started a dance program over there.

## **Physical Facilities**

A key visual picture is being done in Room 134, where the folk dancers used to do their thing until gymnastics split and went to their own space. In 134, where the folk dancers did a lot of their rehearsals, I remember seeing Dee doing rehearsals with Marilka, a Polish dance expert. She was here when I was a student and it was the first time I saw Dee. I think I was a little bit jealous thinking *Why is he working with Marilka, when we could be working with her? What is that about? He is a modern dancer anyway, how strange.*

I remember that experience in 134 and in 185/187, which was closer to my time because eventually, after my junior year I did modern dancing because that was where all the girls were. Some of the folk dancers were doing dance. Bella Lewitsky came and I remember being in the bleacher section. I remember her doing figure eights with her arms. I thought that modern dance was strange but interesting. I ended up doing beginning modern dance class, an all men's class with Dee Winterton, if I'm not mistaken. Randy Boothe and I were in the same class. At least, that's what he remembers, I don't.

Again, it was because of Dee that I thought modern dance was interesting, as well as music theatre which I thought was interesting, but had never really done anything with it. With all the facilities, I know that one of the recreation rooms I did a lot of stuff there being in the program. So 185/187, again, and the ballet studio, 283, I think. All of these places where I spent a lot of time.

## **Significant Changes in the Department**

Obviously one of the most recent changes is that we moved to the College of Fine Arts. That was something that should have happened many years ago. It didn't happen for several reasons that weren't really political and personal rather than being really based on the facts—what we should do, how we were better aligned. In Physical Education or Health and Human Performances, we were always supported well. I didn't feel that there was anything lacking. I think we got more than we would have otherwise because we were special. We were the face of the college in a way we wouldn't have been in the fine arts, because there were so many other faces that had a performing aspect to them that was unique like ours.

I think that allowed dance to foster in ways that it might not have. I remember Jim Mason's thought that if we were a "fine art," we couldn't be in the fine arts without offering FAs—which I personally think is absurd. Jim Mason was the Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communications.

On the other side, we had Phyllis Jacobsen who refused to have us go to fine arts because we "weren't a fine art. We were physical education, and that is where dance was supposed to be."

Neither of those positions was tenable as far as I was concerned. I felt like we were both and all of those things together. We weren't anything less because we were here, but I think we are something more now in the Fine Arts.

Significant curriculum changes: I think the growth of the department, particularly in relationship to the changes in ballroom and folk dance areas have been monumental and have made the philosophical base for why you do what you do. Having the four forms as primary forms is incredibly complex and doesn't allow for, I think, a well-defined vision of what needs to happen in the dance department. I think we are very unique in the world of dance. I think it serves and hinders us in some ways. I think at the

place where we are now presently, it is a great place to be in the “divisions,” for which they should not have been named divisions in the first place.

I also think that in the department there is a performance aspect that drives the department instead of a curriculum major base, which I think has caused interesting dynamics in the department throughout its history. I think it needs to be examined. I think we have gone through several changes moving from Women’s PE to dance that have made a real difference in how we saw ourselves, and who we are and what we do. I think it became apparent that this was not going to be a traditional college curriculum and that the department was not driven by a curriculum, but by performance—it was more the performance needs rather than the curriculum needs.

Physical facilities: the gymnastics used to be in the north part of the building, but after, I don’t know how long, it was clear we needed more space. They redid a huge gymnasium and made six studios out of it. We have a faculty studio, a clog studio, a jazz studio, a ballet studio, a modern dance studio, and a folk and ballroom studio. I think that was a major facility change that allowed for curriculum change and expansion.

Departmental structure: I think since we have been a department, we have had the division of the four divisions, plus the Cougarettes who were there for a long time as a performance group. When we went to Fine Arts, they went elsewhere. The division structure and the genres were more important than the major in dance. Each were silos that didn’t cross back and forth in curriculum. I think we have worked through that. I think we have a curriculum that got rid of tracks in the major. I think that was helpful and important for the students and for us as a whole unit instead of seeing ourselves as parts and pieces in this whole that we have.

### **Advances in the Field**

I think education has gotten more complex in ways that make me glad I’m at the end rather than the beginning of my career. I don’t know if I would have stayed for very long. At the beginning of my first ten years, this was a fun place to be. It has been fun since, but the first ten years, you were here with your best friends, doing the best thing you could do in the world. After ten years, it started getting more complicated in terms of the structure of the department—in terms of, I think the last ten to fifteen years, what the university does in teaching and assessment and in all the administrative assignments, we spend less time in the classroom where we can make an impact and more time in committees and all kinds of stuff.

Education is still a great place to be. I cannot imagine having a career in anything else.

Advances that have changed the program: I don’t know that there are things that affected us as much as other dance programs. It has to do with the intellectual content of the classes we have and their relevance to the outside world and political issues. I remember being here as a student and not really knowing the Vietnam War was going on. I think others may have been more politically minded than I have been, but I think this community tends to be fairly in solitude. I’m not sure if we are aware, even now, for our students—I don’t think we have the ability to understand and negotiate the complex world they are going to be in. I don’t know if our curriculum allows us to do that. A part of that is because the classes we offer are fairly traditional and we don’t get into larger issues such as political feminist issues, that have affected who we are.

### **Technology**

About five years when computers got complex, I had a secretary that told me she would not process a hand written document, and she would not type it because she expected me to have it typed before I handed it to her. I remember thinking I was going to throw away my computer. Computers have not made our job easier. There is more that we have to do, not less that we have to do.

## **Dance Companies**

My wife Kathy Parsons Debenham created the Dancers' Company, which was fashioned after the Ryan Woodbury and the national dance companies that were going out into communities to do performances, do lectures and teach. Kathy's thesis was that: the Dancers' Company.

It has since been renamed this year to Contemporary Dance Theatre. We did that for a lot of different reasons. In my paper there is the justification because everyone always left the "the" out in front of it. Dee specifically wanted that. We tested the name for a long time. Dancers always put the apostrophe in the wrong place—instead of being afterwards and then Company.

There was also a problem in the department because dancers would say "We are all dancers; can't this be our company too?"

It wasn't until we changed our division dance to contemporary instead of modern dance, which I think was a significant move, that we did this. I think that modern dance tends to align itself historically instead of what is happening now. Contemporary is not a contentious name, but it was problematic because it is associated with jazz and lyrical jazz. It is also used by many dance companies through the U.S. and Europe.

When I was here with Dee, we did a lot of touring because he was well connected here in the United States. In Utah, he was a major dance figure. It was a major history that should have been written. I'm actually the person who was supposed to do that, twenty-five years ago. He was able to really have a broad sense of what dance should be. It's not opposite as a spectrum, but he was interested in dance being entertainment. He worked with Sundance for a long time. In that particular place, he would invite his mother to see what she thought, since she was a rancher's wife in Woodland, Utah, up near Kamas. If she enjoyed it, he felt his work would be able to touch people. He was always interested in the artistic end of things as well. He worked in theatre in the valley, in Salt Lake for the Church, and also as a choreographer for the Young Ambassadors, until he died in a tragic accident in 1985. His philosophy of dance and he has always influence me.

I felt with the Dancers' Company, it needed to be something that moved between art and entertainment. There are so many that say art and entertainment are separate. I think they bleed in such a way that if art is not entertaining, not just surface kind of fluff, but if it is engaging and entertaining, art is doing what it needs to do. I also think that as an entertainment base, it is something we want people to enjoy and have them feel good when they come out. That entertainment end has to have the art philosophy too.

Like I said Dee and I worked together on the Dancers' Company for the first five years and then he went to the Young Ambassadors full-time. He thought I was grounded enough to take care of the tour myself. We toured everywhere in the United States: Hawaii twice, Florida for major residencies where we spent time in schools teaching and creating a class, which Marilyn Berrett teaches now, that shows how to use movement in the elementary school to get kids involved in the creative process.

Dee was a genius at that. He was the recipient of the National Endowment of the Arts, as was I, which I received because of his influence. All of that world came through Ririe-Woodbury, which funneled into who we were through Kathy in the Dancers' Company. That was the beginnings of it. I've been director of that for thirteen years. We had our first international tour and went to the Far East: Japan, Korea; all that is in the tour histories. We also went to South America. I took a sabbatical in 1989 and in that time we shifted to someone else in the division.

The company was successful. We did major things throughout the US, which the company has done since with the Performing Arts Management. The beginning was done by Dee and I except for the international stuff across the United States because of our teaching residencies we had to do.

One of the significant things was the major kind of touring we did. We had eight men in the company, which was really great. It was always great to have Dee with us when we went and did our teaching residencies as well as mine. Kathy toured with us for the first few years. Then, again, I didn't do anything in terms of performance work.

One of thing things that was important about Dancers' Company was that Dee wrote a position

paper. The Young Ambassadors, ballroom, and folk were touring. Folk obviously celebrates the culture as we grow, but not specifically from choreographic ideas. Ballet came from the courts, codified in what it was doing and where it was going. YA were entertainment based and very American, but not specifically LDS.

One of the phrases in the position paper Dee wrote for support of the Contemporary Dance Company is still used today: “The dance department supports the culture from which dance springs.”

That was specifically directed at what the contemporary dancers could do for Mormon culture and that would have a dance form to represent us, particularly in choreography. We had work that came from social contexts. I think that is an important historical thing for the department as well.

I’ve been the director of DancEnsemble and I did that for ten years, maybe twelve. The most significant thing I did was “His Story, Her Story, Our Story.” We invited Jeff Freedman, a national scholar, performer, and historian who takes oral histories and moves them into performance. I saw his work and decided that it was relevant particularly to us—with our sense of family history. I wanted to get students to have a concrete beginning from their LDS culture, grounding in the church, and a doctrinal position. We spent a few days doing structure and working with artifacts from the students. After he left, we set forth to interview individuals who were somehow related to the students in DancEnsemble. We created a rubric of questions that centered on three life themes: defining moments, family and love, and romance. With those we whittled it down to twenty questions to pick and choose. From that I called to see what we could do to create a piece that really came from the interviews that came.

In the ten to twelve years I was director, that was the most satisfying piece. It was a collaborative piece of choreography. Many students said they were worried about the piece coming together. It is one of those things that you’ve got to see it in its process. It ended up being an hour and fifteen minutes. Many people thought it should be performed in Sacrament Meeting, it was so spiritual. We used text, humor, and montages for the back. We had a sculptural thing where everyone would give an introduction with their photo. We had people speaking in Danish and Japanese introducing their family members. It was particularly poignant at the Q and A after all the performances.

It was so inclusive because it didn’t put on propriety like in church; it talked about relationships that were tough. There was one part about post-partum depression. Eventually the father found a mother hiding a child in a closet. This was during the time of the feminist movement idea that women should be out working.

This woman said in her interview, “A woman’s work is in relationship. Her work is in connecting people and that’s why I chose to leave the work force and became a mother.”

This is confirming and it doesn’t paint our lives as pretty pictures. It says we are real people with real problems. I think that is why the piece was so important to me.

We took some of that piece with members of the Dancers’ Company to the Oral History Conference in Guadalajara. I took some dancers to Prague that dealt specifically with LDS focus or thoughts about life and death from interviews our students did with family. I was division administrator for four years. I almost left BYU because of it. It was a tough job. I don’t think you understand an administrator’s position until you’ve been there. With every shift, they understand a bigger picture of who we are and what we did. I don’t think we always see the broader picture, and it allowed me to see it.

I was the graduate program coordinator and then the graduate program went away. We had to make sure grad students who were with us got to complete what they are doing. When we tried to reinstate the program the work was initiated by me and followed through with Cathy Black after that. It had a lot to do with ideas I laid out and structured for the program. I’m not sure if it will happen. I’m not sad; I think it is good to have students go out into the world.

I think we needed to give our students a voice that allows them to say “This is who we are and this is what is important about what we do.”

I think it is an essential thing as an intelligent scholar as well. We often do it in a passionate way, which comes off as preachy in some ways. I would hope that is what we can send our dancers out doing. They are great performers and educators. I think that of all those involved with other genres, many will become teachers because of the philosophy of sharing and moving dance forward in a way that is positive.

A phrase I often use with some humor is that what we do is “lovely and of good report.” It sounds like a Young Women’s lesson, but it is about being grounded in the gospel in a way that shines through us. I think our performing groups do that. After smiling for five years on a stage, I think for a long time I thought that was what it was about. They look happy on stage. At one point, I had a major shift: these students do these things that embody their positivity in the world. That is something the world needs. It’s not phony or fake; it is real. It is the way they learn to be each other in a community of saints.