

# En l'Air

News from  
MASSACHUSETTS  
ACADEMY of  
BALLET  
Educational Training  
Association

SPRING  
2020



*Erica greets the smiling faces in her Ballet 1 class online. MAB has joined most other educational organizations in moving all of our classes online, as best we can, during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## The Signature Wall: A 15-Year Celebration

by Charles Flachs

As some of our readers know, the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet is modeled after the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, founded by our mentors John White and Margarita de Saa. Their daughter Melinda White now directs the studio.

When that studio was first built there was a large blank wall in the dancers' waiting room. But the wall didn't remain blank for long: Each time a dancer received a contract to dance professionally, a signature went up on that wall. It was like a magnet to dancers training there. Everyone wanted to have their name represented on that wall. I recently spoke with a former PAB student, Jessica Lang, who has choreographed internationally and recently appeared at Mount Holyoke College with the ABT Studio Company for a choreographic premiere. She vividly remembers looking up (at the then very few names) on the wall and dreaming of one day signing herself.

But the extraordinary dancer/choreographer was not the only artist who got to be represented. A position

with a cruise ship, at Disney World, or in Las Vegas procured you the right to sign. The care and dedication of the dancers who studied at PAB regardless of the type or style of dance they were doing, was what was important and celebrated.

We have continued this celebration of dancers at the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet on our own wall. In our 15 years of training dancers, there have been 15 signatures on the wall. We have dancers who are dancing in professional companies both large and small, as well as dancers who have found other venues to continue their artistic dancing endeavors. We are promoting the love of dance: Even if a student does not continue as a professional after their studies here, they are a part of our dance community.

After 15 years of training dance students of all ages and abilities, the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet looks back with pride on the accomplishments of the dancers. Some have gone on to college to dance, some to professional careers, and some to other lives



*(Above left) Dancers gather as Isabelle Haas signs the wall in 2018. (Above) Rachel Aylward signs the wall.*

influenced by the dance education they received here. Most importantly, they all received an education and a love for the art form of classical ballet that will sustain them through the rest of their lives.

As directors, we value creating a place where the talents and dreams of all the students can flourish while receiving professional-level dance training. I look at our wall of signatures as a measure of success!

# The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet

4 Open Square Way, Studio 403•Holyoke, MA 01040•413.536.6200•massacademyofballet.com



# A Winter Wonderland

January 25 • 4-7 pm  
Mill 1 at Open Square

Presented by Massachusetts Academy of Ballet Educational Training Association to benefit MABETA and MIFA Victory Theatre

Celebrating MAB's 15<sup>th</sup> Year  
Rose & Charles Flachs, Directors

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Massachusetts  
Academy of Ballet





## 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

It was a timely suggestion from MABETA board member Mary Yun to Rose Flachs: “Let’s create a 15<sup>th</sup>-anniversary celebration for MAB, and let’s have the event at the Open Square event space.” Mary is a designer; she could envision the MABETA dancers performing the snow scene with beautiful décor, good food, a silent auction, and fantastic conversation. MABETA’s mission is to collaborate within the Holyoke community. Massachusetts Institute of the Fine Arts Victory Theatre was the ideal partner, because someday MAB students will perform on the stage of the Victory Theatre.

This event became the Winter Wonderland on January 25<sup>th</sup>. It was an evening of fun and celebration with a dance performance, a silent auction, and appetizers by Blue Door Gatherings, all against the backdrop of Holyoke’s famed mill buildings at Open Square transformed into a magical place with added charm from Forest Flowers. Hosted by Holyoke’s very own, Aaron Vega, attendees were enchanted by the dancers, savored the creations of a rising chef, and bid on wonderful items donated by the supporters of the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet. As a bonus, guest artists Sabi Varga and Boston Ballet second soloist Emily Entingh premiered an exclusive original dance piece.

The proceeds from Winter Wonderland benefitted MABETA and the Victory Theatre.



***“We were so happy to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary Winter Wonderland event. It was great to see old friends and all the wonderful dancing. MAB will always hold a special place in our hearts.”***

— Deb and Matt Haas (parents of alum Isabelle Haas, a company member of Dance Now! Miami)

***“Congratulations to MAB and to Rose and Charles for 15 wonderful years of engaging young people in the beauty and joy of ballet. MAB has been an important part of our family, and we are so grateful for all the ways your teaching has helped our children grow as people and dancers. It was wonderful to celebrate together!”***

— Loran and Max Saito (parents of alums Liam Saito, corps de ballet with Royal Winnipeg Ballet; Evan Saito, a rising junior at Earlham College; May Saito, a recent trainee at Tulsa Ballet; and Nolan Saito, a rising junior at HARID Conservatory)

## Senior Spotlights

by Catherine Sanderson



*(1 to r) Amber, Sally, Chloe Larouche and Lila*

This spring, Massachusetts Academy of Ballet celebrates three seniors who have danced with MAB for a total of 28 years: Amber Fournier, Sally Gill, and Lila Norton.

Amber, who will graduate from South Hadley High School, has danced for 13 years—all with MAB. Her favorite role was either Arabian, one of her first real solo pieces, or Snow Queen, one of the last roles she ever had the chance to do with MAB. She enjoyed so many aspects of these roles—from the distinct choreography challenges to the costuming to the opportunity to get even closer with the other dancers. Amber describes how dance is her “form of expression. When I am facing hardships elsewhere in life, or something just isn’t going how I want it, I can always turn to dance in some form.”

Lila, who attends the Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School, has been dancing since she was four, and with MAB for the last ten years. Her favorite role is Spanish Hot Cocoa in the Nutcracker. She loved dancing to the castanets in the Spanish fandango, the gorgeous red and black frilly costume, and “being able to show a little sass!” Lila loves “being able to express my emotions through dance,” as well as “feeling the energy of the music and dancing with my friends.”

Sally attends Longmeadow High School, and came to MAB five years ago, when she decided to become more serious about ballet. Her favorite role was the Fairy of Generosity, which her first “bigger” role. It also let her realize how much she had grown as a dancer since starting at MAB. Sally loves dancing because “it requires one to continuously push their boundaries and strive to be better.” She also finds it “a really good outlet to relieve the stress and pressures that I face at school, because I go to dance and I can just put all my focus into whatever we are working on.”

All three dancers have wonderful memories of their time at MAB. For Lila, one of her favorite memories was the year she danced as one of the Four Little Swans in an annual Spring performance. She loved wearing a tutu for the first time, the challenge of

keeping every movement exactly in sync with the other dancers, and dancing with her three closest dance friends. As Lila describes, “That ending moment when we all landed together with our arms up in the air, sweaty and exhausted, and realizing that we had done it is a moment I will never forget.”



One of Amber’s favorite memories is going to YAGP to perform in an ensemble piece. “I got to spend time with the people that mean the most to me,” says Amber, “and I got to compete in a competition that is known world-wide for its creation of professional dancers.”



Sally finds it impossible to pick a single moment, but feels grateful for all the friends she made at MAB. She notes, “they have all made a huge impact on my life and helped me develop into a better, more well-rounded person.”

Each senior shared some special words of advice for younger MAB dancers. Amber advises, “Keep going. Keep pushing. Remember that progress only happens when you have the confidence in yourself first, so find that confidence and pursue what you love in the world of ballet and dance.” Lila reminds younger dancer of the value of feedback, saying, “When Rose and Charles correct you in class, take it as the biggest compliment and keep on growing as a dancer.” Sally advises younger dancers to “just put themselves out there and not to worry about failing or rejection.” She remembers feeling really behind for her age group when she first started dancing at MAB and at times felt like she should just give up. But Sally “stuck with it, worked really hard because I loved it, and eventually I was given some really amazing opportunities.”

MAB will miss each of these three dancers, but fortunately all plan to stay involved in dance in some way. Amber will attend Elms College in the School of Nursing and as an Honors Scholar, and may participate on the Elms dance team. Lila will attend Skidmore College, and plans to take dance classes. Sally will attend the University of Rochester, where she will major in political science and continue to dance (potentially as a minor). We wish our three seniors all the best in their future endeavors!



*(1 to r and top to bottom) Lila and Amber on the right as little swans; Amber, Lila and (far right) Sally in Mighty Feat; Sally in Waltz; Amber as a Nutcracker party girl; Amber and Lila (center) as Nutcracker Wisteria flowers; Lila and Amber (right) as little dancers; Lila; Amber as Nutcracker Snow Queen, and Sally in a summer photo shoot.*

## What to Look for In Choreography?

by Charles Flachs

Dancers who study at the MAB are constantly looking forward to performing opportunities. We make an effort to perform as much as possible without interfering with the training of daily classes. We must choose performance opportunities carefully and with a nod to where the professional dance world is headed.

Rose usually works with students on a classical segment and Charles tries to challenge the students with more contemporary movement. Classical training is difficult and often serves to prepare students for all styles of dance so it will be continued no matter what, but today most companies and colleges are just as invested in contemporary work, so students must do both.

So, you may ask how can you determine what is good choreography? And if it is contemporary what does that really mean?

I asked my daughter Connie, a professional dancer of eight years who performed both contemporary and classical work, to offer her astute opinion on this matter. She argued that choreographing a contemporary work should not be simply trying to find a new movement pattern or technique. After all, there really is nothing new in the universe, there are just different combinations of how the ingredients are mixed together.

Connie observed that new works sometimes originate from experimental or workshop types of collaboration, not dissimilar to the way a scientist performs research working in a lab to discover a complicated answer to a formula. However, for the lab work to be released to the public, it must be translated into terms that the public can understand. The same is true with dance. Even if there is no identified story line or familiar technique, the audience has to have an access point to be let in so they can feel something from the work. Is there a structure to the piece, is there emotion that you can identify? Or does it simply seem like different (new?) movement for the sake of different movement?

It can be said that good dance is simply good dance, easily recognized by its structure, technique and emotional content. Yet art is always somewhat subjective. Looking for elements you can recognize will give you something to latch on to when viewing an unfamiliar style or technique of dance. Ultimately, there may be some styles you just don't care for and that is completely legitimate!

We can attempt to quantify what makes good dance through these guidelines, but we each are entitled to our own aesthetic taste and opinions. I hope through considering some of these parameters you find yourself able to connect to more works, or have a new framework to explain why a piece does or does not resonate with you.

### ON THE CALENDAR Online Open Classes

Age 12+ • June 22-August 14  
MWF Ballet 9:30-11, Tuesday Ballet 6-7:30  
Thursday Contemporary 9:30-11

### Pre-Ballet, 1 & 2 Online

July 20-24, One hour a day  
Register and pay online by July 20

### Summer Intensive (if possible)

July 27-August 14  
Beginning Ballet Workshop and Levels 3-5  
In-studio with social distancing if possible

### Open House

Saturday, August 14

### Fall Classes

Beginning the week of September 14

Visit [massacademyofballet.com](http://massacademyofballet.com) and our Facebook page for details and updates!

## Transitions

Erica Maillet and Maendy MacFarland will be leaving MAB this year. We want to thank both of them for their excellent teaching, exceptional creativity, and the significant contributions they have made to MAB and to the students they taught. We wish them our very best in their future endeavors. THANK YOU!!!!



Delivering inspiration via wifi: Rose teaches from home, April 2020.





Photo by Mary Yun

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