

“I dance – now – because...”

by the Danceaturgs – April 17, 2020.

I dance now because it is my only hope for the future and my only motivation to continue trudging forward when all the rest of the world has stopped. Being trapped inside, away from my loved ones, and forced to put my career on a temporary hold— it makes life feel lonely, miserable, but most of all, purposeless. Dance is the only “purpose” I have left, and in fact, it always has been my number one purpose. Before the quarantine, my love and passion for dance was the purpose that fueled my energy to get out of bed in the morning, to work hard at bettering my craft, and to race towards my inevitable future with excitement and an open mind - knowing that my future was full of endless opportunities and possibilities. Although our world’s current situations have stripped from me all of these potentials and the wonderful feelings that they bring about, dance being my purpose has not changed, but rather, the way it serves as my purpose has. At home, I am still allowing dance to fuel my motivation to continue perfecting my craft, but it is more-so offering me the very sliver of hope for the future that I need in these desperate times. I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have some aspect of dance to keep me busy when I find myself slipping into a state of sadness because I can’t leave my home or interact with the people that I love. It is the only thing that will stop me from breaking if I haven’t already; and if I have, dance is the only thing that can pull me out of the cracks... and even that is a challenge. I don’t intend to turn this into an overly dramatic speech, or to flip the mood into something we all don’t need to hear right now, so I will end by saying that despite all of the negative physical and emotional impacts felt due to our current situation, I dance now because it feels like the only thing I have left. Even if it be fifteen minutes of improvisation in the small tiny corner of my bedroom - where I frequently scrape my knee on the sharp corner of the bed frame - that alone is enough to keep me going at least another day. I dance now because it is a reminder that I can get through this, and that once I do, dancing will feel better than it ever has, and I will be refreshed and ready than ever to work hard and dance my butt off towards a never more shining future. – **Kristilee Maiella**

I dance now because it is my outlet. I dance because it gives me comfort in the midst of a very uncomfortable time. Being taken away from one of my most cherished places, school, was very difficult for me. I had to leave my friends, my roommate, and all my classmates. The transition that I had to make while moving was quite frightening to be honest; dance makes me feel at home. Dancing allows me to feel connected to the place and people that I miss so dearly. Being submerged in a situation like a global pandemic is something that no one could have ever possibly imagined; it feels daunting and scary at most times. If it weren’t for dance, I believe I would be more lost than ever in this time of confusion. – **Ellie Sharpe**

Dance to me now is what I want it to be. I have more freedom than I've ever had before. That can either be very good, or very bad. And honestly, in the time of a global pandemic, it's a little bit of both. It depends on the day.

I am able to choose my classes. I can make my own schedule. I can dance for as long or as little as I want to in any given day—literally; besides school work, there is nothing else to do. Nowhere else to go. As LA dancer/choreographer Lucy Valley wrote in an Instagram post, I “go to dance when I need it”. This has always been the case with me—throughout college, I spent many late night improving in the studio. But, in the time of a global pandemic, this thirst to dance seems to be a different kind of hunger. Dance feeds me in a different way right now. This doesn't necessarily mean it is more fulfilling. In fact, it may be less. It helps me get by.

To quote Valley again, “Some days I doubt my relationship with dance. I feel as though if I'm not constantly trying to better myself, my movement, etc. that I'm not a ‘true’ dancer”. As dancers, we're used to being in the studio all day everyday. Having that privilege taken away is certainly a shift—for both the mind and body.

Dance to me now is whatever I need it to be. – **Madalyn Rupprecht**

I dance now because it is always what I am meant to be doing. It would take a lot for the world to get me to stop doing what I love. No matter what's going on with the weather, politics, or any other situation, I will still dance. I am blessed with my two legs, access to music and freedom to move and express myself, so I will continue to do so.

Dance heals people, so it would be selfish to stop at a time like this. Not only has dance been healing me, but the others around me. When I'm taking 10:00am ballet in my living room and my parents see something they like, they immediately whip out their phones and start recording me, so they'll have that video for their enjoyment and they even send to others. Dance engages me physically, emotionally, and socially all at once, so I do it now to keep myself in check.

Living life now has been a huge adjustment to what could have been, but we must take care of ourselves in order to stay sane. A lot of things have had to change recently, but dance as a whole will always be a constant in my life. It is that one thing I can always depend on, no matter what is happening in the world, so that is why I not only do it now, but I do it forever. – **Jess Lavenda**

I am always slightly perplexed when I am asked why I dance. While I am aware that, in fact, there are many people who do not dance, it is such a foundational aspect my life that I find it difficult to imagine otherwise. I think this question of “why” troubles me because it assumes I have a choice between at least two options: to dance or not to dance. You could ask, “why did she wear that shirt,” assuming that the person has more than one shirt. On the other hand, you wouldn't ask, “why do birds fly,” except as a scientific or philosophic question. Flight is simply in the bird's nature. Dance isn't a choice for me. It's what I do. It's who I am. It's in my nature. I dance now because this is the only time in which it is possible for me to dance. Dance is a particularly time-based art form. I have danced in the past, and I will dance in the future, but in the present I can dance. So I dance in the now and shall dance in all the nows yet to come. –

Amelia Sanders

Now.

Now is every present second, minute, hour that I spend while I am in class. Now is our current global state of quarantine. It is the room I find myself accommodating as I try to regulate my daily schedule within the confines of my childhood home. It is trying to advance toward career and personal goals within a place I have outgrown long ago. Now is also my mentality; my personal processing of this external tornado of chaos that seems to spiral in a new direction every day.

Within this whirlwind, I dance. I dance because I must. Moving is my outlet for communicating my emotions, yes; but it is also how my body talks to my brain before the words can even begin to form in my head. I dance to keep myself mentally and physically stimulated, to try to maintain any sense of normalcy that I can amidst this craziness. However, I also dance for my own creative liberty. It may be selfish, but I am absorbing all parts of “now” -- the good, the bad, the confusing, the losses -- and using them as my purpose for dance. I have reason to keep pushing because despite how difficult this all may seem in the “now”, in tomorrow’s “now”, I will be better because of it. In someday’s “now”, the tornado of today will be gone and life will continue. What I’ve done with my time between will impact how far I will have come, and that is the light that keeps me dancing, even in the dark times of “now.” – **Amanda Edore**

I dance now because I have to. Not only does my day to day revolve around taking 10am ballet zoom classes and then modern and choreography and the assignments about dance history and methods on top of that. My day has to be about dance because canvas tells me so. But there is also apart of my now that needs this constant presence of dance to stay sane. Fives weeks in the same house, never leaving, seeing the same faces day in and day out. Movement keeps me grounded, it keeps my head on straight and my back aching with a dull ever present pain: it reminds me that I’m alive. Right now I’m alive. I can get up and eat whenever I please , read a book ,watch a movie, skip class, sleep all day. Right now the world has come to a halt as if we all got on to a train and reached the point where the tracks haven’t even been built yet and we all must sit and wait for those outside the train to build the new tracks. One by one they place the metal and the screws into place so that we can keep moving forward to our next stop. I am one of the lucky ones, inside the train, safe, away from the dangerous work being done outside. Right now I get to turn to my craft, discover the freedoms that my new barreless, marleyless and mirrorless place has to offer. Right now I can have endless improv jams in my room with no one to tell me to point my toes, get my leg up higher or fix my pelvis. But then again dancing alone for so long starts to make me feel insane like I am putting all this energy out there and there is no one to receive it, no one that really sees me. Staring at my friends and teachers through my laptop’s tiny camera can only connect us so much, can only make us feel seen on a superficial level. But seeing the people outside the train windows working day and night to fix the railroad tracks is the hardest part. It makes me feel guilty for this temporary security and safety and ability to create that I have. But its all only a moment, a small part of the many moments that make up my life. And looking back on this moment I know that I’ll remember the new dance my body created in my bedroom and on the lawn in my backyard. Ill remember the moments where I couldn’t bring myself to get out of bed and dance at all. The moments string together to form the now and this will turn into my future and I might not have any clue about what that future is but I trust that when the train tracks get built the train will move forward once again and take me in the right direction and I plan on dancing all the way to the next stop. – **Megan Theobald**

I dance, I dance now, I dance always, I dance forever...

I dance now because what else is there to do. I dance now because if I didn't, I would be stuck in a constant battle between my thoughts with no other way to express them. I can write, I can sleep, I can take a walk, I can talk on the phone, but instead, I dance. I dance now to block out the noise. I dance now because not even a global pandemic with no end date could stop me from doing what I love. I dance now to remind me of those that I've lost and have come before me. But it's weird to define the reason why I dance now because it has pretty much stayed the same.

I dance, I dance now, I dance always, I dance forever... - Jasmine Bullen

"I dance now because...." I feel that I'm supposed to write something about how dance has always been my passion and my main source of happiness blah blah blah...but in these times, I've realized a crucial reason why I dance is to just be with people-classmates, teachers, an audience. Now that this is taken away (except virtually but let's state the obvious-it's nowhere near the same) I dance for different reasons.

Right now, I dance for the betterment of my physical and mental health. I've noticed that dancing is a great way to trick my body into working out, especially when I don't even feel like moving that day. Dance helps my mental health by giving me a sense of normalcy and routine. Having my scheduled Montclair classes, and taking some on my own gives my day structure which decreases the probability of me going insane.

I do get waves of sadness, longing for a big studio to move in and people to share art with and live music to jam to, but then I think of how lucky I am to just be alive and healthy enough to improv in my living room with my headphones blasting in my ears and perform for my dog. I know better days are coming! – **Rachel Ambrose**

I dance now because I love it. Point and blank. I am dancing now because that is what I want to do, it is what I know to do, and what I love to do. Though the current situation is...uncertain...the now of dance is thriving. Companies, choreographers, and dancers all over the world are stepping up and stepping out (virtually) to provide with art, education, and hope. I dance because of the that. I dance to help provide that, and the video Olivia and I had created with the Graham goes to show that:

Maxine Steinman said, "This is beautiful and brought tears to my eyes!"

Kathleen Kelly said, "...this version is the one that made me sob"

Elizabeth McPherson said, "It made me cry with joy to see all of you working remotely but staying connected through powerful choreography and your incredible spirits."

Lone Larson said, "...This is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen... - I am in awe!"

It was all of these responses that truly showed how beautiful and moving this video was.

And if I can quote myself, "Even though we may be all stuck remotely in our homes, we had the ability to harness the amazing power of dance, along with the use of some technology, and create something that can bring joy in a time of uncertainty" (Montclair News Center).

This is why I dance. – **Alfonse Napolitano**

I dance (now) because... it's unlike anything else in my daily life. It is related to and yet light-years away from the way I use my body normally. In this time especially, where the places I can go are limited, moving my limbs in an unusual way carries a sort of magic. When I dance now, I am mesmerised by what I am able to do, how I am able to twist and dip and slide and jump. It's beyond getting out of bed in the morning and standing at the stove making breakfast; I have the opportunity to "shapeshift" into someone else entirely. Improvisational exercises such as "stealing" another person's walk or moving like another species are now exciting puzzles which can elevate my daily life. Even the burn of tired muscles is somehow electrifying, beyond the monotone hum of one more day indoors. Dance has always been a tool of escapism, but now it's one of the only ropes dangling down into this deep well. – **Sarah Macken**

I dance "now" for many different reasons. Of course, one would be self expression. There are many things that are out of my power, there are many things I am currently limited to and I am losing motivation to accomplish anything. Besides Amelia, I have no one to really confide in about these feelings. Yes I have my family, but I don't want them to worry about me since they are in NY. I have so much bottled up anxiety that working out or dancing is my healthiest outlet.

I also dance (and record) for self reassurance that I am improving. I always feel that I am not growing as an artist and as a technical dancer. Even hearing critique from my professors, their comments are not enough for me. I am selfish in that way, but it is truly because I don't see what they see. I think that is the problem I have to overcome and is a journey I have to go on in which I am not dancing to please others, but to truly dance for myself. If I truly like it, I won't have to care what others think.

I have been recording myself either improvising or taking a standard class. When I record a standard class, I can compare it to previous classes and see where I can improve technically. When I record and review my improv sessions, I reminisce on the feelings I had doing each session. I look back on my freshman year videos and acknowledge that I have come a long way. You can see the uncomfotability, the "I have to do this dance move now" etc. When I watch my improv videos now, I just have a feeling of accomplishment and I can say to myself "wow I am actually dancing for me." – **Becky Seow**

In this quarantine time, I dance for a multitude of reasons. I dance partly because it is a grade. I know that I need to dance and attend my zoom dance classes because I would be penalized if I did not. I also dance because it is a constant in my life. While my surroundings and intrapersonal relations have changed, I have dance. It will always be there for me no matter how hard times get I am always able to rely on dance. I dance because it makes me happy. It is my favorite thing to do in this life. It provides me an outlet of self-expression while I feel like everything else has been taken away. – **Serena Brown**

As of right now in our current situation what else is there to do. Dance brings me joy and keeps me active. Every morning I wake up looking forward to taking/teaching class via zoom. This is the only thing that is keeping me going. Now, I have a reason to get up in the morning, to take ballet. Dance right now is also giving me a schedule. I have classes all day and I teach at night. Dance has always given me a schedule my whole life. The cliché saying "I can't live without dance," is true and has always been true even in quarantine. Dance is time demanding but it taught me a lot about being a decent person in this world. Back to this moment in time, dance is the only thing I can rely on and know it will be there.

– **Emily Burke**

The Cycle

I wake up at 7 am every morning, and for a minute I forget that it's not a normal day. I drink my coffee, do my warm-up routine, pick out an outfit (only once in a while does it include a leotard), grab a snack for later, and head out the door. I make the same drive every day, down CT-15, probably driving faster than I should because there's nobody on the highway. It's 9 am, where is the rest of the world? I get to the studio, unlock the flimsy front door, make sure it's locked securely behind me, and then make my way upstairs in the dark.

Over my clothes I put my back wrap, my trash bag pants, my warm-up booties, and my vest. We can't afford to turn on the heat when the business isn't making any money, so I place the tiny space heater behind me at the barre. I wave to my classmates and teacher on zoom, trying to force a smile. I am happy to see them of course, but I can't help but wish it was in another capacity. I get through another semi-satisfactory class, wave goodbye, say "see you next week!", and shut my computer. Some days feel better than others. Some day after a class I smile, and think, *it's such a good day*, and other days I feel defeated. I stay in that studio for another five hours usually. I can't bear to go home and just sit, I would think too much. I take live classes on Instagram, pre-recorded classes on dancio or youtube, teach myself solos from videos of the Taylor Company, attempt to branch out into other styles of dance, or try cardio dance classes (hearing yourself breathe that heavily when you're alone in a big empty space just makes you feel out of shape). Sometimes I just dance around the studio, trying to feel everything I can. Laughter, sorrow, air, movement, fear, uncertainty, music washing over me and into my bones, and most of all, loneliness.

There have been moments where I find myself crying as I move or just stand there, allowing myself to take in the grief. I try not to let myself indulge in this too much because, what is the loss of the end of your senior year and the beginning of your career, in comparison to a life?

I had what felt like so many well-deserved opportunities coming my way, that just disappeared into thin air. I've never been the type of person who gets things handed to them, I have to work my ass off for them. All of the sudden, everything was out of our control. I hadn't done anything to have these opportunities taken away, and there was nothing I could do to get them back. And I couldn't get back the time I would lose with my friends. There was no closure, no goodbye, it was just over. Wrapping my brain around that is something I haven't quite gotten around to yet. This is unprecedented. I thought I had my entire life planned out. I would train as hard as I could, go to a good college for dance, graduate, move to the city, work a bunch of part-time jobs, and try to get into one of my dream companies. Now all there is to cling to is uncertainty.

Since I no-longer have a job, will I be able to afford living anywhere in the city? Will there be any jobs for me to even apply for once things get up and running again? Will the arts survive this? Will I be able to start auditioning for companies? Will performances even be able to be held? How long will it take for the arts to recover from this? My body won't last forever. When will I be able to graduate? The most difficult part about these uncertainties, is that there is no one to blame for them. There is no anger to be had; nowhere to direct it.

I finish up at the studio, lock the door behind me, and make the same drive home. When I get home, I walk my dog for an hour, usually just walking in circles, gossiping on the phone about nothing to my friends. I make dinner, do whatever homework I have the will-power for, and then stay up too late watching Netflix. I try not to leave myself too much time to think, because it will become a never-ending circle of the same thoughts. There is no need for useless panic, so I go to bed, ready to do it all again tomorrow. – **Olivia Passarelli**