

# Dancing Times

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## Dancers' Career Development

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# Career Development

By Linda Yates,

Executive Director, Dancers' Career Development

“I wanted to write and thank you for the Fund’s personal and financial support over the last few years which has been instrumental in making my career change as smooth and painless as possible. There is life after being a dancer — it’s challenging but equally rewarding!” Thus avers Richard Whistler, formerly a dancer with Scottish Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet, who is now Marketing Officer at Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

In an ideal world, Richard’s sentiments about a career change would be the norm for every dancer who moves on from performance to the next stage of their working life. Dancers’ Career Development exists to enable this inevitable transition to be a positive life experience.

We all understand that a career as a dancer can be exhilarating but it is also inevitably short-lived and sometimes unpredictable. A major life change can be exciting and uplifting for anyone, regardless of profession. But leaving the familiar behind may also be painful and confusing. During the ten years I have worked for

“A career as a dancer can be exhilarating but it is also inevitably short-lived and sometimes unpredictable”

Dancers’ Career Development (in its various developing forms) I have become acutely aware of the two sides of this particular coin.

A career in dance has to be completely focused from an early age and contemplating the future — and its possible difficulties — is often not part of the equation until the inevitable has occurred. Yes, we all know that long-term preparation for the future should ease such problems when they arise, but the pressure of sustaining a performing career will often overwhelm other possible priorities. At that stage the future is just — the future. So one day the dancer may “suddenly” have to acknowledge unexpected injury problems or have to realise they have reached that “certain age”, or that their career has not and will not move up that professional ladder.

Let Bruce Sansom explain how DCD helped. “One of the high

points was the realisation that the Dancers’ Career Development support system really worked. After 18 years specialising as a classical ballet dancer, the safety net — in the shape of the DCD — was there, offering guidance and financial assistance as I transitioned towards a new career.” Bruce is currently a Fellow of the Vilar Institute for Arts Management at Washington’s Kennedy Center. This follows a year-long Management Training scheme with San Francisco Ballet.

Dancers’ Career Development has recognised that today many more dancers are seeking assistance as the world of work, as we have known it, changes. While dancers, like everyone else, are experiencing downsizing and cutbacks, there is one major difference: on the surface, there are fewer opportunities for dancers to spread their wings.

This situation may seem comparable to that of sportsmen who, also, have to become single-mindedly dedicated from a young age. But, in their formative years dancers do not generally experience the luxury of training in parallel with intensive additional studies, as is possible in the world of sport.

No, dancers are *not* footballers. It is more likely that a dancer will be a highly skilled specialist yet with a narrower life experience. With little familiarity with the world of work “outside”, few, if any, academic qualifications or training in any other fields, the dancer’s potential could easily become lost. This realisation can be a huge shock. What to do? Where to go, both to earn a living and to be fulfilled?

So what happens at the crossroads? It is so important not to categorise this time as being about the end of people’s careers. Think of the positives. In dance, where would you be without the right mental attitude, determination and discipline? Probably not in dance for long! These are great qualities for success in any field and a good starting point to encourage individuals to look at the possibilities for the next stage in a career.

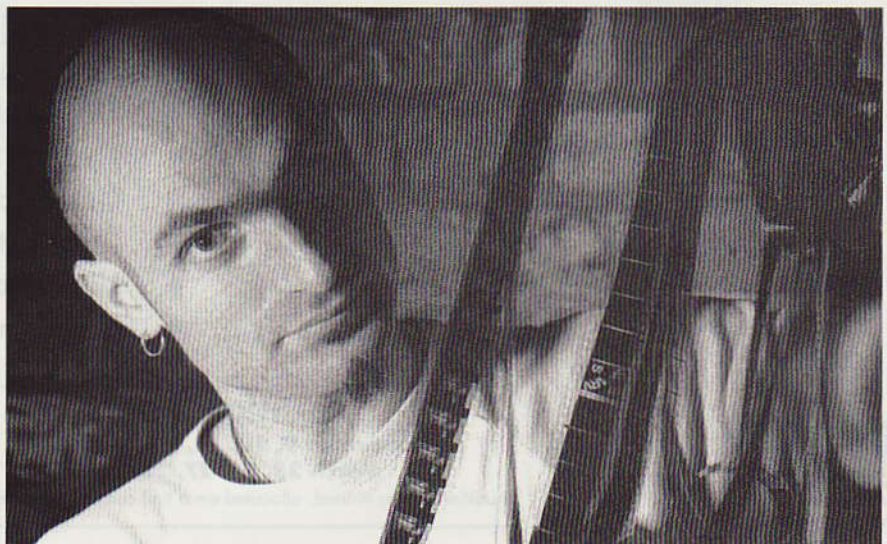
So what is Dancers’ Career Development? Why does it exist and how does it function to help you? We recognise that transition may be as much about loss of the past as hope for the future and seeking outside support and guidance may often prove a positive step.

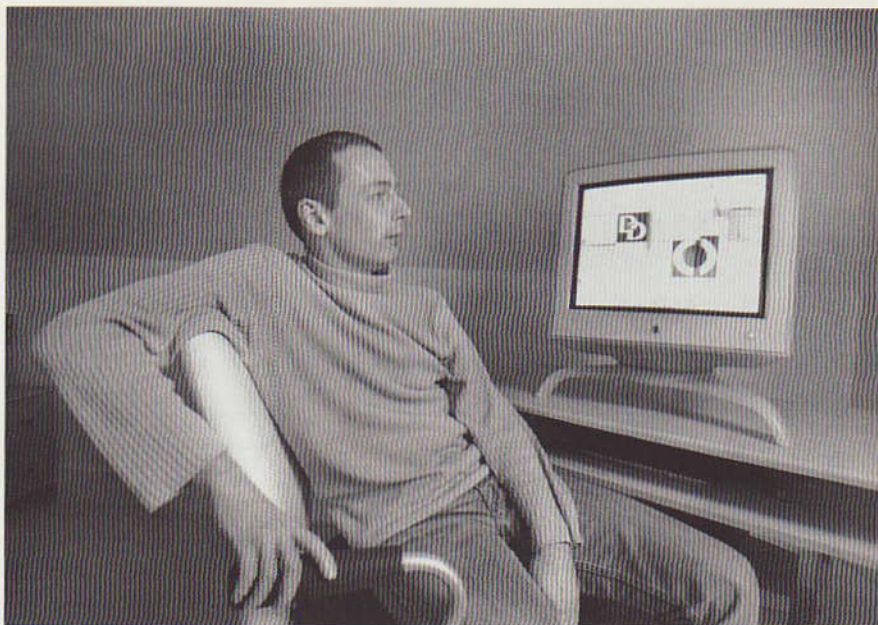
Initially established as Dancers’ Resettlement Fund, it was felt

## Robert Tannion

(film, directing, choreography)

Robert Tannion currently works as a performer/ choreographer/ director and is now undertaking retraining as an Avid editor. Once armed with this new information he will be able to combine all these skills to then focus more seriously on film production/post production. He is contactable on [addict@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:addict@globalnet.co.uk) or on 07939 258571.





**Oliver Hindle**  
(graphic designer and  
choreographer)

Oliver Hindle, former Birmingham Royal Ballet dancer and choreographer, continues to choreograph — notably for Dance School of Scotland and Central School this summer — but has added graphic design to his career portfolio and now has his own design company. To see his website go to [www.oliverhindle.com](http://www.oliverhindle.com).

that the name might conjure up scenes of nomads seeking shelter rather than reflecting the true work of the organisation. And so the name changed to Dancers' Career Development, which better described the aims of the scheme. At its heart is the belief that dancers will want to be thought of as *dancers*, regardless of the stage of their careers, and that, while part of their working life is indeed performing, their career can move on, positively, both inside and outside the world of dance.

A dancer can — and should — retain that identity for life. But DCD can help him or her to become a dancer who is, in addition, a florist or teacher or photographer or graphic designer or architect. We firmly believe that one set of skills should not be lost at the expense of the other. Bruce Sansom again: "Have I missed performing? Not at all. My ballet career was a wonderful part of my life but for me the decision to stop dancing was not an end, but the start of something new."

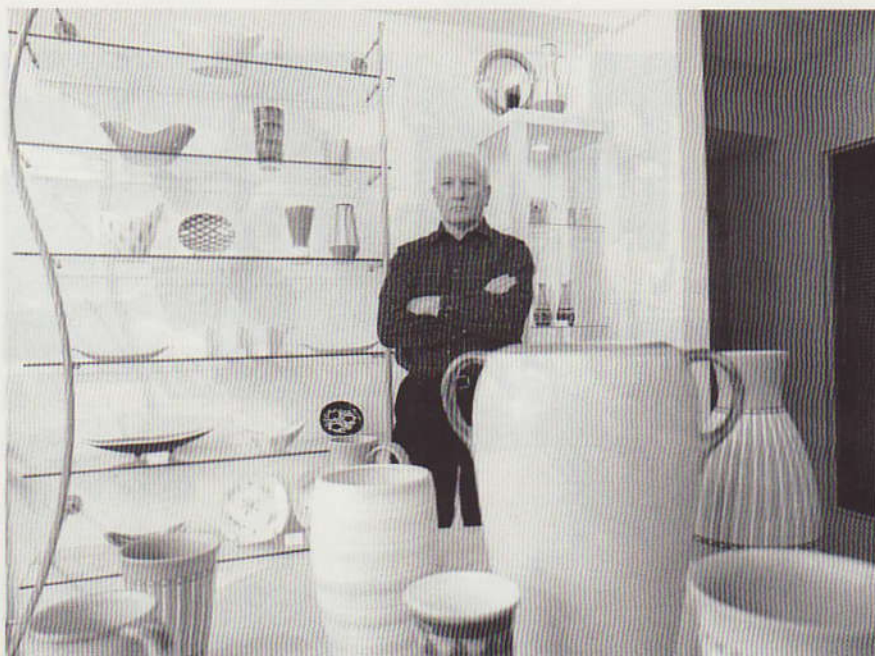
DCD services include counselling, educational advice, on-going support (from initial enquiry through to end of retraining), emotional counselling, and psychometric testing. Confidentiality is of paramount importance and DCD's wide reach means that networking into other charities for welfare assistance and business contacts provides scope and flexibility.

2002 will see DCD trailing a number of sessions, primarily with students, to guide and assist in the writing of CVs and interview techniques — two subjects which are of vital importance throughout one's working life but often overlooked. These short group talks are aimed at taking the mystery out of CV writing and injecting confidence into anyone attending any type of interview. Whilst this work is already successfully carried out in some dance schools, DCD's aim is to extend its own portfolio of services within its network and to target the many freelance dancers who may not have had the opportunity to cover this area in the past.

**T**o recap, The Dancers' Resettlement Fund was founded in 1974 by the late Peter Williams OBE, with the Arts Council and British Actors' Equity Association. Under its first Resettlement Officer, Margaret Lawford, its aim was to offer advice, guidance, counselling and funding to professional dancers whose careers had been with the main Arts Council-funded companies, the Resettlement Fund's work being underpinned by contributions allocated from those companies' Arts Council grants. Professional dancers who had been performing for a minimum of eight years, six of which had been with one of the contributing companies, were eligible to apply for funding. Dancers whose careers had been cut

**Gary Grant**  
(ceramic designer)

Gary Grant in his gallery, Gary Grant's Choice Pieces, where he has been able to transform a long standing interest in ceramics into a new profession. His gallery specialises in mid-20th century ceramic design but he also makes his own pieces and accepts commissions. It was thanks to the Dancers' Career Development that he was first able to take a two year course at West Dean College studying first restoration of ceramics but then finding greater satisfaction in creating. Although his shop at 18 Arlington Way is almost on the site of the former Sadler's Wells Theatre, he has put his dancing days behind him, but he will long be remembered in a galaxy of former roles with the Royal Ballet, among them Alain and Bottom.



## Máire Clerkin

(broadcast journalist)

Máire Clerkin, Irish dancer and teacher, formerly with The Hairy Marys, Clerkinworks Irish Dance Theatre Company and KICK Irish Dance Theatre Company, has just finished a one year PostGraduate Diploma course in Broadcast Journalism at The London College of Printing, Clerkenwell, and intends to make her new career as a radio presenter while continuing to teach Irish Dance and theatre to adults, young people and children.



short by injury were also eligible to apply.

In 1987 a legacy from the estate of the English artist and writer, Kay Ambrose, prompted the trustees to expand the work of the Fund to help professional dancers employed outside the contributing companies, particularly those performing in musicals, theatre, television and film. With the support of the Arts Council and Equity they formed The Dancers' Trust, which is now under the chairmanship of Ned Sherrin CBE. The funding of this branch of the organisation is more complex. As well as the Arts Council and Equity, support has been given by the Society of London Theatre and private individuals but further financial support is desperately needed.

Raising interest in the Trust, and bolstering its limited funding, is thus an on-going challenge to the DCD staff. At present the Trust is able to offer bursaries every other year. For example, 2002 sees the Leslie Edwards OBE Bursary from his legacy — reported in the June issue of *Dancing Times*. Bursaries are seen as an invaluable method of encouraging sponsorship and, at the same time, raising the profile of the Trust.

This valuable work is being mirrored globally with the IOTPD (International Organisation for the Transition of Professional Dancers) co-ordinating research and communication into the many

aspects of dancers in transition. Currently, there are 23 members who are working towards common practices world wide.

As a dancer on the brink of transition, the first stage of the process is to take time out and consider your career options and — most importantly — what feels right for you. Be realistic, rational and focused to ensure you are making the correct long-term choices. DCD are here to help you through that process. And let us be honest, sometimes the going may get tough. When Ross MacGibbon, now Executive Producer Dance, BBC Classical Music TV, retrained as a film-maker/producer he had to face certain realities. "For me, the early difficulties were perceptions of me by other people, I started at the bottom of the pile, as everyone in this business — a runner, for a TV production company, in my case — yet I had had a 'successful' career in a 'glamorous' job [with the Royal Ballet]. I felt that younger people than I, who shared the same job responsibilities, found it hard to relate to someone whom they perceived as having seen better days. An employee confessed that my experience as an ex-dancer in a famous company made it difficult for them to treat me in the same way that runners in the film business were traditionally treated, i.e. yelled at, overworked etc. It was a double-edged sword — here was someone who was very keen to learn, who would do everything asked of him, however menial, and yet they felt they had to treat me more carefully than other, younger people



## Josephine Jewkes (architect)

Josephine Jewkes, after dancing leading roles with English National Ballet (Tatiana and Juliet) and Rambert Dance Company (*Dark Elegies*), decided to train as an architect and has just been awarded a 2:1 BA Hons in Architecture by Kingston University. She has now moved with her husband Tim Almaas to Stockholm where she hopes to work in an architect's office but to maintain her contact with the dance and theatre worlds on set design and coaching.



Anita Griffin  
(hair-and make-up artist)

Anita Griffin, formerly one of the leading members of London Contemporary Dance Theatre, is now pursuing a new career as a hair and make-up artist in film and television after gaining work experience at Greasepaint Studios. However she is still involved in dance as a rehearsal director, staging, for example, Robert North's Christmas entertainment *The Snow Man* at the Peacock Theatre. She can be contacted by email on [griffinanita@hotmail.com](mailto:griffinanita@hotmail.com).

in my position."

In Ross' case the qualities he had needed as a dancer came to the fore. "Perseverance was never a problem for me. The disciplines of working as a dancer more than compensated for any lack of formal qualifications in my business. I was certainly aware that I was competing with people much younger than I but I had specialist knowledge and focused on an area in which I knew I could shine. I combined my knowledge and love of dance with learning the television skills that would lead to me seeing my new ambition of becoming a television director being fulfilled."

There are at present approximately 160 dancers registered with DCD and new enquiries can run to about ten per week. Many of our dancers will be in training for up to four years but, however long the transition, we shall monitor their progress and also receive valuable feedback from them. Our success rates are encouraging. DCD has assisted over 1,000 dancers to retrain. Our last survey revealed that 85% were still employed in their chosen retrained area. We do see career trends. Ten years ago, teaching enjoyed popularity. This was replaced by physiotherapy; and today we accommodate a range from landscape gardeners to Pilates practitioners. Anything is considered. A heartening side effect has been a growing network of dancers with specialist knowledge who are in a position to help each

other.

So what of the future? Awareness is all. From the very start, schools can develop the dancers' view of themselves and their careers through reality testing and communication skills in order to assist the teacher/pupil/artistic director/dancer relationships. Over the past ten years, contributing dance companies have successfully instigated annual meetings. Now, through the Mackintosh Foundation, awareness meetings with dancers in musical theatre are about to be run. In addition, the Royal Ballet School is leading the way by encouraging regular meetings each term with all year groups of students. Here at the DCD our aim is to promote our scheme amongst students and dancers alike and to gain funding to ensure that needs can always be met. Our door is always open. Come and see us in Rooms 222-227 Africa House, Kingsway, London WC2B 6BG, telephone: 020 7404 6141, fax: 020 7242 3331, e-mail: [dancers.resettlement@virgin.net](mailto:dancers.resettlement@virgin.net). Please, make an appointment first so we can give you a useful amount of time. ■

The photographs which accompany this article are all by Asya Verzhbinsky, one of DCD's many success stories, who, after nine years of dancing with BRB, retrained as a photographer through DCD. Readers will remember her *Bayadère* rehearsal and performance photographs in our March 2002 issue.

### Reiko Miura (Pilates instructor)

Reiko Miura, formerly of Birmingham Royal Ballet, studied Pilates technique and now has her own North London Pilates Studio at 25-27 Bickerton Road, Archway, London N19. Her telephone number is 020 7281 5855.

