

For over 9 years I was an instructor, ballet director, and competition choreographer and coach at Carlsbad Dance Centre, rated the #1 dance school in all of San Diego County, one of the Top 5 dance schools in California, and #32 in the entire United States. With a student base of around 800 and a weekly schedule of over 125 classes, CDC was not just another dance school on the corner. The entire staff was reputable for the knowledge and experience each brought to their craft and we often attended conventions in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Las Vegas in order to continue our educations and study with some of America's best known dance instructors and choreographers whom now regularly appear on *So You Think You Can Dance*. Refreshed and revitalized, we would return to Carlsbad and pass on what we had learned to our students. Many of the students, especially those on the competition team were also fortunate to attend these conventions and study first hand with instructors like Mia Michaels, Tyce Diorio, Bryan Friedman, Wade Robson, (Emmy Award Winner) Marguerite Derricks, and too many more to name. Often times, my students were singled out to learn choreography and appear on stage with these great choreographers, and some also received talent scholarships to study at schools such as Millenium Dance Complex and Broadway Dance Center!

The first week of July marked my second anniversary as an instructor with the Lake Erie Ballet. Upon arriving into the Erie dance scene, you can imagine my shock in discovering that not only were most of the dancers and teachers not watching my favorite television show, and not aware of whom these great dance masters were, few seemed to have any idea how much dance was changing throughout the entire world of dance. I knew that my students would be primarily ballet-focused, and I knew that it was not likely that many students had studied with the choreographers I studied with, but I could not have known until spending some time here just how much the dancers in Erie would need to change and improve in order to compete for jobs with west coast dancers. Being good or even great in one genre of dance doesn't cut it anymore; dancers have to be trained in multiple disciplines of dance, and they need to excel in all of them.

The formula for *SYTYCD*, for instance, is that a dancer first auditions within their favorite or best genre in order to get noticed. They are then sent to learn and re-audition doing a Hip-Hop combination (They choose this genre because this is where you can most quickly notice who can adapt and pick up new choreography quickly). When the dancers reach the semi-finals in Las Vegas, they must quickly learn and perform short dance pieces in Contemporary, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Ballroom, and Musical Theatre. This is how, in two days, the judges are able to choose their top 20 dancers from nearly 150 contestants! Once a dancer has reached the top 20, they must then perform whatever dance they pull out of a hat and then put their fate in the hands of America's voting viewers. By the end of the finals, the last four dancers will have each performed dances in Jazz, Musical Theatre, Contemporary, Ballroom, Disco, Hip-Hop, and the newest genre to be added, Classical Ballet!

I have been asked many times where a dancer from this show will go when it is all said and done, and my answer is always this; "Pretty much wherever they want!" Many will go on to teach master classes and travel with the choreographers as their apprentices to various conventions. The more well-rounded ones will be offered contracts with ballet and contemporary companies, or even begin their own choreography careers. Some also go on as "industrial dancers" performing in music videos, television, and movies.

I have also been asked many times why I am so adamant about expanding the curriculum at Lake Erie Ballet, and why I felt it was so important to rename the school Lake Erie Academy of Dance. Firstly, any true balletomane has become aware that every great ballet company, in order to compete with the popularity of the contemporary dance companies, has had to include at least 25% contemporary dance into their repertoire. This means that students who are dreaming of dancing with the likes of PBT, ABT, or SFB will all have to display excellent ballet and contemporary technique when they audition. Secondly, we offer so much more than Ballet now, including Contemporary, Jazz, Tap, Conditioning, and Pre-School programming, I think it's important that our name reflects who we truly are now. The student that attends Lake Erie Academy of Dance has the good fortune to not only receive outstanding ballet training along with opportunities to perform with the Lake Erie Ballet Company, he/she now also has the opportunity to learn the most cutting edge techniques and styles, comparable to what they are seeing on television, the internet and movies, opening the door to professional dance careers much wider than it would have been just two years ago!

The city of Erie is a community undergoing many changes and much growth over the last 10 years. With this growth, it is only deserving that the artistic culture continue to evolve as well. Lake Erie Academy of Dance looks forward to the opportunity to facilitate this evolution. As the director of this school, I find myself thriving on introducing the dance students of Erie to the most progressive styles of dance, as well as different methods of teaching and training. I would like to extend a heartfelt invitation to the many dancers in the area who are becoming aware of Dance's growing width and breadth, and who would like to explore what we have to offer.

Hope to see you in the studios,

Kirsten Carpenter
LEAD School Director

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