

Here's To Our Community

Memorialized in former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's children's book entitled *It Takes a Village*,¹ "it takes a village to raise a child" is an African proverb that means an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment.²

The need of the artist to create is undeniable and their villages continue to support them. During these dark days of the COVID-10 pandemic, performing and fine artists have been denied their traditional communication with their public as theaters and museums closed down throughout the world. For those of us who live in New York City where the worst of Covid-19 hit last spring, it was no Broadway shows, no spring, summer or fall dance seasons, no summer festivals, no dance classes. Yet almost immediately, artists' resourcefulness shone as they continued to create, teach, and perform their art in new ways. Throughout the world, dance teachers posted daily class on YouTube, Zoom, Instagram, and other social networks to reach their students. In an innovative online Spirit Gala Benefit entitled *Still, We Dance*, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater melded individual cell phone movies of their dancers from their homes reinterpreting the iconic ballet *Revelations*. Adding to the authenticity of this performance were dancers at the beach wading in the water during the *Revelations'* section entitled "*Wade in the Water*,"³ dancing separately but together. Many companies, such as New York City Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre, have released curated performances and live galas via YouTube and other online platforms.

The healthcare professionals who work with dance companies have been hard at work too. Through Zoom, FaceTime, telehealth vehicles, and other online media they worked to advise the dancers on staying in shape and healthy. Many Olympic athletes reported that while there was great disappointment in having the Tokyo Olympics cancelled, they directed their disappointment into something positive, taking this time to refresh: to rest, heal injury, cross-train, and de-stress.⁴ Although this pandemic and the political environment in the United States of *Black Lives Matter* is a period of great trauma and psychological strain, our dancers have also learned the value of sleep, less travel, and improvisation apart but together. Healthcare professionals came together through organizations such as Dance/USA, PAMA, IADMS, Ausdance, and One Dance UK to post information and issue documents such as "Return to Dancing and Training Consider-

ations Due to COVID-19"⁵ and "COVID-19 FAQ"⁶ for dancers and dance companies returning to the studio, issued by the Task Force on Dancer Health at Dance/USA.

The dance world watched closely, exchanging ideas and lessons learned as we moved from spring to summer to fall. The Washington Ballet streamed a virtual fundraiser online from its studios on June 18th, but it included live portions with dancers and gala leaders in studios together.⁷ Several participants became ill, testing positive for COVID-19 squashing early hopes to start back. Time passed. In mid-summer, the Mariinsky Ballet hosted galas featuring solos and duets followed by full-length ballets in the theater with audiences.⁸ Despite weekly testing, on August 13th the company suspended all performances, classes, and rehearsals due to 30 people contracting coronavirus.

More promisingly, the Compañía Nacional de Danza successfully performed at the Festival Internacional de Musica y Danza de Granada in Spain in July. It was outdoors, audiences were masked and seating capped, and the company followed a strict protocol that included testing, home rehearsals, and careful management and progression of return to studios in pods and distancing. Masks weren't removed and touching and partnering didn't occur until July after every dancer tested negative. In Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Ballet began returning to rehearse in small groups in masks, but by July had experienced a new wave of infections and had to close.⁹

Dance is primarily an indoor activity. With fall, temperatures have dropped as we return to schools and jobs. I've perused the reports and websites of many companies around the world to see what current guidelines are posted. Australia and New Zealand have managed COVID-19 well, and current guidelines posted by Ausdance recommend social distancing but don't mandate mask wearing in dance studios. Dance studios opened at the end of July in the UK, and according to the Royal Academy of Dance, face coverings are not required for dance classes, so long as other Covid-safe measures are in place such as social distancing.¹⁰ As of Sept 24, the UK government mandated that "performers must wear a face covering at all times other than when in the course of their employment or in the course of providing their services (for example during rehearsals and performances)."¹⁰

In August 2020, a cluster of 112 COVID-19 cases was associated with fitness dance classes in South Korea. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

included this report on their website, which recommended vigorous exercise in closely confined spaces should be avoided.¹¹ While ZUMBA and Yoga classes have met in parks this summer, this no longer remains feasible as the temperature drops.

Meanwhile, the Dutch National Ballet opened for performances in mid-September, but then cancelled as the Prime Minister limited indoor areas to a maximum of 30 people. Later that day, the Dutch National Opera & Ballet received an exemption from the City of Amsterdam allowing 250 visitors per activity and performances were back on.¹² By late fall, the Metropolitan Opera, the largest performing arts organization in the United States, cancelled its entire 2020–21 season.¹³ Broadway announced it will not reopen until Fall 2021. New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theater, Mark Morris Group, Miami City Ballet, Boston Ballet, and Houston Ballet have canceled their 2020 performances. The majority of them, with posted website safety guidelines, are holding in-person studio classes for company members and students in small group pods with masks and carefully marked out 6-foot circles to manage social distancing.

As groups experiment with different ways of returning to the studio, rehearsal, and performance, we watch with bated breath and fingers crossed. Could this be a way forward for the members of this village? We need to get this right, the world needs us. Still, We Dance.

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