West Virginian Dancers: The Creation and Development of the West Virginia Ballet Festival/West Virginia Dance Festival Community

Lauren Angel
lacangel@gmail.com

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WEST VIRGINIAN DANCERS: THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF
THE WEST VIRGINIA BALLET FESTIVAL/WEST VIRGINIA DANCE FESTIVAL
COMMUNITY

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College of Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History
by
Lauren Angel

Approved by
Dr. Kevin Barksdale, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Greta Rensenbrink
Dr. Kat Williams

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Acknowledgments

Growing up as a young dancer in Huntington, West Virginia, I regularly attended the West Virginia Dance Festival (WVDF), which developed from the earlier West Virginia Ballet Festival (WVBF). Although I recall feeling a distinct sense of nervousness at each festival, I also recall an overwhelming sense of excitement. As compared to other dance events that could easily run in the hundreds or thousands of dollars, my friends and I paid only minimal fees because the WVDF was state funded. The event invited all concert dance schools in West Virginia to participate. My teacher, Ella Hay, reminded my class that ours was the only state to have such a festival. Her words stayed with me, and when I left West Virginia to continue my dance training I never again participated in an event that was as inclusive as the WVDF.

This thesis has proved remarkably easy for me to research and equally difficult for me to write. I grew up in Huntington, West Virginia and began taking dance classes when I was very young. At twelve, I attended my first WVDF. I later left the state to continue my training and performed as a professional dancer. These experiences, and eventually my work as a dance teacher in Huntington, guided me as I researched this project. I am particularly indebted to Ella Hay, my employer and former dance teacher. She has allowed me to use her collection of WVBF/WVDF materials, has sat down to be interviewed, and has kindly given me both her guidance and her time. I am also grateful to Elizabeth Hay-Martin, Jerry Rose, Norman Fagan, Velma Schrader, Deborah Novak, and Nick Mishoe, all of whom kindly agreed to discuss their memories of the festival and West Virginia concert dance with me. My thanks go to Dr. Kevin Barksdale, Dr. Greta Rensenbrink, and Dr. Kat Williams of my thesis committee. They have
generously guided me throughout this process. I also thank my family, who supported me as I struggled to shape my project.

The same factors that helped me research this work have occasionally hindered my writing. As I collected materials, I became increasingly aware of the many personal connections I have to this work. As a student, I participated in the WVDF for several years. As a teacher, my own students (under Hay’s direction) performed my choreography at the WVDF from 2009-2012. I have taken class from many of the West Virginia teachers who attended the festivals, and several guest teachers at the WVDF frequently taught at my high school, Virginia School of the Arts. While examining old programs, I discovered that Jill Bahr, my former director and Resident Choreographer of the Charleston Ballet Theatre, taught at the WVDF in the 1980s. As I conducted interviews and name after familiar name was mentioned, I continued to discover more of my own connections to the event. These and other links clearly have personal meanings and implications for me. By revealing my relationship with the WVDF, I hope to consequently reveal as much of my own biases as possible.¹

¹ “1983 West Virginia Dance Festival Presented by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History,” The Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center, Charleston, West Virginia, April 22-24, 1983; “1985 West Virginia Dance Festival Presented by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History,” The Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, April 26-28, 1985; “1986 West Virginia Dance Festival Presented by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History,” Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, April 11-13, 1986; “1987 West Virginia Dance Festival Presented by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History,” Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, April 10-12, 1987.
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Abstract

This thesis examines the West Virginia Ballet Festival (WVBF), which began in 1968 and became the West Virginia Dance Festival (WVDF) in 1981. This work studies the four groups that made up the festival community, including the West Virginia performance dance teachers who founded the festival, the West Virginia performance dance students who attend the events, the out-of-state professional guest artists who taught and performed at the festivals, and the non-artistic professional administrators who organized the WVDF. The WVBF/WVDF was part of West Virginia regional culture and the national performance dance boom. I argue that performance dance must be incorporated within historiographic understandings of West Virginia culture and identity. This study of performance dance in West Virginia shows that West Virginia was part of the national performance dance boom and contributed to the national cultural shifts in midcentury United States. Additionally, this work asserts that regional performance dance must be included within the historiography of performance dance, as this inclusion changes understandings of gender roles in performance dance.
Introduction

“Do You Wanna Dance:” Finding Concert Dance in West Virginia

“Dance is the only art of which we ourselves are the stuff of which it is made.”

“Bodies never lie. Therefore the truest expression of a people is in its dances and its music, its earth castings.”

In 1976, Jerry Rose, founder and Chairman of the West Virginia Ballet Festival (WVBF), gave an interview with the Beckley Post-Herald about the annual event. Rose and his wife, Sherry, ran the Beckley Dance Theater. Both were professional dancers in New York for a number of years, but Beckley was Rose’s hometown. When the pair stopped dancing, they moved to Beckley and opened their school. In his interview, Rose pointed to the achievements the WVBF had made since its 1968 founding, discussed the evolving format of the festival, and celebrated the regional distinctiveness of the event:

The festival participants will be treated to classes, lectures, and performances by the reputable North Carolina Dance Theatre of Winston-Salem, The professionals will award scholarships to those showing outstanding talent at the festival . . . It is the only one of its kind in the United States . . .

The WVBF (later the West Virginia Dance Festival/WVDF) was one of the few, perhaps only, events of its kind. Non-professional teachers formed a statewide festival to promote performance dance training in the state. In 1981 the WVBF became associated with a state agency, the West Virginia Division of Culture and History. Before this transition, however, teachers planned and implemented a successful statewide performance dance event without the assistance of a professional administration. The remarkable efforts of the original group of teachers produced a twofold outcome. The most visible result of their efforts was the event

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itself, the yearly WVBF. Less visible, but no less substantial, was the community the festival created.4

This study demonstrates that four different, and sometimes overlapping, groups of people participated in the transformation of the WVBF/WVDF. The central group was the West Virginia teachers, who helped to construct the gathering, repeatedly returned to the events, and formed the foundation of the festival community. Festival administrators included these teachers as well as formal members of the festival board who set the goals for the festivals and managed the logistics. Rose was the Chairman, and the majority of the board consisted of the male spouses of attending teachers. WVBF teacher Ella Hay explained that “at this time it wasn’t the dance teachers, it was the husbands that were the organizers and ran things. This freed up the teachers so they could concentrate on teaching and choreography, on their art.” The dance teachers were involved in the artistic elements of the WVBF and were primarily women. Hay noted that the administrative work performed by teachers’ husbands allowed these women to focus on their art rather than event management. Nevertheless, at least one female teacher, Ella Flippin, served on the board as well. Norman Fagan and the Cultural Center staff were the WVDF administrators. Fagan was not an artist himself but was the West Virginia Division of Culture and History Chairman. He implemented and directed the WVDF until his retirement in July of 1989. The third festival group was made up of the West Virginia students who attended the WVBF/WVDF with their teachers. These students were deeply affected by the festivals, and

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4 Jerry Rose, interview by Lauren Angel, Beckley, West Virginia, August 27, 2010; “State Ballet Festival Set in Parkersburg,” Beckley Post-Herald, April 1, 1976; In this work, the term “performance dance” is used to describe dance that is that is intended to be performed for an audience by trained, usually classically trained, dancers. Performance dance is often referred to as “classical dance;” however, this term often excludes modern forms of dance such as contemporary and hip hop. The use of this term in this paper is therefore not intended to exclude these forms of dance. “Theatrical dance” is another commonly used term but “theatrical dance” implies the need for a theater whereas “performance dance” merely indicates dance that is performed in front of an audience; “professional dance” will refer to dance that is performed in a professional atmosphere, meaning one in which dancers are highly trained, usually paid experts. “Pre-professional” will refer to an atmosphere or program in which dancers are in training to become experts.
the event shaped their conceptions of and progress in concert (or performance) dance. Finally, professional guest artists also attended the WVBF/WVDF, and many of these artists taught students and conducted auditions for pre-professional summer programs. Other artists performed in the festival concerts, and a few artists both taught and performed at the event.5

The WVBF/WVDF occurred during the mid-to-late century “dance boom,” a period when American middle-class audiences accepted concert dance as an accessible and enjoyable art form. The expansion of performance dance involved an increase in the size and number of urban professional companies. West Virginia did not participate in the professionalization aspect of the dance boom; without an urban area large or affluent enough to support a year-round professional dance company, midcentury concert dance in West Virginia remained nonprofessional. West Virginia nevertheless participated in other areas of the boom by initiating and sustaining the WVBF/WVDF and its associated artistic community.6


This work will follow the festival and its community from the conception of the WVBF in 1968 through its transition into the WVDF and its subsequent establishment as a stylistically inclusive event. This study will show that the WVBF/WVDF created a noteworthy regional concert dance community that was also fundamentally connected to the national concert dance community. Regional dancers within this artistic community were deeply influenced by their individual relationships with their art and their West Virginia-Appalachian culture. They combined the many facets of their identities through performance dance and created an identity that was both artistic and West Virginian.  

The study of the WVBF/WVDF regional dance-based community is especially important because it reveals aspects of a world that historians have previously disregarded. Historians have studied the professional dance generated within the mid-to-late century dance boom but have not studied non-professional regional dance in this period. Because there is a significant amount of information and interest concerning well-known dancers and choreographers, it is understandable that the historiography has not yet seriously addressed regional dance. This methodology, however, results in a historiographic focus on the very top of the concert dance world. Our current body of literature consequently neglects the vital contributions of large numbers of regional, rural, and non-professional groups. Jennifer Homans argues in *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet* that ballet is a historical and cultural product and thus fundamentally connected with both time and place. The story of ballet must therefore be understood within a specific historical and cultural framework. Homans writes: “Because the ballets themselves are

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illusive and ephemeral, and because ballet has no historical continuity, its story cannot be told in terms of itself. It has to be set in a larger context.” This “larger context” should not be limited to primary urban areas and their professional troupes. Professional urban artists have influenced and been influenced by regional artists. Regional artists have additionally aligned themselves with professional urban trends while simultaneously differing from these groups in significant ways. One important example of regional difference in concert dance is the success enjoyed by numerous female artists as leaders in regional communities, compared to the smaller numbers of female artists in leadership positions within major, urban companies. To fully comprehend the history of the dance boom, scholars must analyze the stories of regional concert dance communities and their relationships with national concert dance.8

Regional concert dance is intrinsically connected to national concert dance, but it is also a part of diverse geographic communities. Concert dance in West Virginia was deeply tied to the national culture of performance dance, yet it was unavoidably linked to the state culture as well. This study of the WVBF/WVDF consequently augments historical understandings of West Virginia. There are no works concerning the development of concert dance in the state or the larger Appalachian region. There are, however, several works that address folk music and artists in Appalachia. Examining West Virginia ballet and concert dance expands our concepts of what is and is not part of the cultural composition and identity of West Virginia and Appalachia. West Virginia has been home to both folk and performance artists, and the state contributed to the

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dance boom in its own distinct manner. This work, therefore, complicates definitions of a West Virginia cultural identity that does not include performance art.9

The first chapter of this study, “‘Dance to the Music’: Creating the West Virginia Ballet Festival, 1968-1976,” chronicles the establishment of the WVBF by Rose and West Virginia teachers. The non-professional WVBF emerged within the mid-to-late century dance boom that also created professional companies in primary urban areas. During this period, the WVBF was a balletically focused event, and Chairman Rose hoped the festival would connect West Virginia ballet to the styles and criteria of national pre-professional ballet. He used guest artists and summer scholarships to tie the event to the educational standards of non-West Virginian pre-professional ballet. The connections between the WVBF and the national balletic world also changed regional artists’ conceptions of ballet and of themselves. Many students who attended the WVBF began to see ballet as a possible artistic vocation. Their balletic identities, or the way they thought of themselves in relation to ballet, combined with their West Virginia identities, or the way they thought of themselves in relation to their state culture. These students ultimately formed identities that were simultaneously balletic and West Virginian.10

Chapter two, “‘For a Dancer’: Developing the West Virginia Dance Festival, 1977-1981,” explores how Fagan, with Rose’s assistance, created a state dance festival able to effectively serve West Virginia artists. His efforts helped the WVBF community transition from a grassroots event to a professionally-administered festival that also incorporated non-balletic artists. Fagan was able to use National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) funds to support the

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event. The NEA itself developed within the context of the dance boom, and during this period the organization also supported major professional groups. From 1977 until 1980, the WVBF and WVDF were separate gatherings, but they became a single event in 1981. The WVDF was a professionalized event that was managed by Fagan and the Division of Culture and History staff. Nevertheless, the festival continued to serve non-professional West Virginia groups. The WVDF, like the WVBF, hired guest artists to teach and perform at the event. Fagan also established an adjudication process to assess the levels and needs of the attending regional troupes. The WVDF encouraged artists to combine their West Virginia and concert dance identities by frequently using professional guest artists who had grown up in West Virginia.  

“‘When We Dance:’ Stylistic Diversification at the West Virginia Dance Festival, 1982-1990,” examines the integration of non-balletic dance styles into the festivals. These additions to the formerly-balletic festival changed the artistic culture of the events and the festival community. At this time, the balletic WVBF community had begun attending the WVDF along with non-balletic modern or jazz dance groups. This type of stylistic diversity connected the WVDF to national trends in concert dance. Beginning in the midcentury, professional troupes performed stylistically fluid works, and even classically-based ballet companies included non-balletic works in their repertoires. Pre-professional training programs therefore had to

incorporate varied types of concert dance in their curriculums, and stylistic inclusions at the WVDF consequently aligned the event with national trends. Despite this new format, ballet remained central at the WVDF. Balletic guest artists helped ballet retain its status, but these same guests also encouraged the inclusion of non-balletic styles. They realized that students needed to become versatile performers in order to compete in the professional world.

The final chapter, “‘Dancing Queen’: Women and Men at the West Virginia Ballet Festival/ West Virginia Dance Festival” asserts that women and men followed divergent, gender-defined paths at the WVBF/WVDF. In the mid-to-late century, there were many more female than male dancers and, consequently, male dancers were more likely to succeed in the national professional world of concert dance. In contrast, female dancers often became skilled performers who worked within regional concert dance. A similar pattern existed for non-performing balletic artists such as choreographers. Historically, men led most of the well-known professional ballet companies, but women often led less-renowned or non-professional groups. This pattern existed in West Virginia, where many female WVBF/WVDF artists were successful in their regional communities, while several male artists worked as nationally prominent professionals. Because gender influenced the careers of concert dance artists, gender was a major aspect of identity at the WVBF/WVDF.12

West Virginia dance artists formed a regionally identified concert dance community using a combination of cultural understandings, words, and movement. Their roles as artists and

West Virginians involved a cultural dialogue, a struggle to resolve their artistic and state identities. WVBF/WVDF attendees participated in a community that was both regionally and nationally associated. This work will trace the formation and major shifts of this community, its connections to and distinctions from national concert dance, and the gendered characteristics of the WVBF/WVDF. It will examine these issues as they relate to the structure of festival events, the West Virginia teachers and students attending the WVBF/WVDF, the festival administration, and the gatherings’ guest artists. The WVBF/WVDF community wanted to introduce its pupils to a form of dance that was an art and a potential career but not a hobby. It invested in students as potential professional dancers and formed a lasting community of like-minded teachers who worked to improve West Virginia concert dance. Their actions negotiated personal identities that combined artistic and cultural associations.  

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Chapter One

“Dance to the Music”: Creating the West Virginia Ballet Festival, 1968-1976

“Rather than have me compete in the dance centers of the world, she wanted me to go to the backwoods of ballet.”

In 1968, West Virginia was geographically and culturally removed from “the dance centers of the world.” In fact, West Virginia had no professional concert dance companies at this time. The state was, however, the home of several independent performance dance schools. West Virginia dance studios were largely disconnected from each other, and these small studios offered students close-knit communities within their separate schools. This setup produced distinctive groups of balletic artists who did not identify themselves as members of a statewide artistic community.

The initial West Virginia Ballet Festival (WVBF) group, which produced the administrators and participants of the festival, was formed by artists from individualized West Virginia schools. Teachers worked to bring artists together at the WVBF, link previously unassociated schools, and create a balletic West Virginia community. Although students continued to attend schools run by different teachers, they formed closer associations with each other through their attendance at the yearly festival. Students who had associated ballet only with their individual school community began to associate ballet with a statewide community that was also connected to professional ballet outside the state. Teachers who initiated the WVBF created a space for balletic artists to meet their peers from around the state. Their actions thus changed the shape and function of West Virginia performance dance.

The development of the WVBF occurred within the context of the mid-century “performance dance boom.” This was a period in which concert dance in the United States

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14 Famous New York City Ballet dancer Allegra Kent wrote this in her autobiography when she discussed her Mother’s desire for her to leave the company and attend the University of Utah, Allegra Kent, Once A Dancer . . . (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 83.

developed into an established art form that boasted reputable professional companies and pre-
professional schools. Scholars have attributed this expansion to several factors including the
middle class embrace of “high” culture, nationally televised performances, cultural celebrations
of youth and physical beauty, and increased private and federal funds. The vast majority of
professional companies at this time developed in large urban areas. Cities offered an established
audience base and access to supportive funds. Studies of the dance boom in the United States
have accordingly examined eminent choreographers, star performers, professional companies,
and the pre-professional schools that trained students to enter professional troupes.\(^{16}\)

By showing that the non-urban WVBF/WVDF was situated within the dance boom, this
thesis will demonstrate that regional and non-professional groups must be incorporated within
the historical narrative of performance dance in the United States. Historiographic disregard of
non-professional schools and companies de-legitimizes regional troupes, diminishes the
contributions of regional art, and contributes to a broader disregard of rural communities. We
can increase our understandings of rural and urban community culture by analyzing the
relationship between regional and urban concert dance. This analysis is an example of the
regionally based research that can deepen our historiographic comprehensions of regional
culture, the mid-to-late-century United States, the dance boom, and performance dance.

**Shaping the West Virginia Ballet Festival Identity in “the Backwoods of Ballet”**\(^{17}\)

The WVBF was the center of ballet in West Virginia from 1968-1976. The formation of
the event fashioned a community of balletic artists who shared an understanding of the festivals’

\(^{16}\) Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, “Internationalism: The Merging of the Disciplines” and
“Ballet Rising” in *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003),
424-531; Jennifer Homans, “The American Century I: Russian Beginnings” and “The American Century II: The
New York Scene” in *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 448-539; Leila

\(^{17}\) Kent, 83.
purpose and goals. Community members also hoped to increase the level of performance dance in West Virginia, so that state students would be able to compete with their peers on a national level. The WVBF was a regionally and nationally-identified event. It served West Virginia artists who interacted with their West Virginia dance students or teachers, and the WVBF administration hired out-of-state guest artists to teach and perform at WVBF events. Festival attendees were, consequently, simultaneously West Virginians and members of a nationalized artistic community. Members of the WVBF group developed their personal, artistic, and social identities within the WVBF culture. Personal and communal WVBF identities emerged from artists’ regional characteristics and their membership within a national artistic community created through the mid-century dance boom. “Identities” were artists’ socialized understandings of which groups they belonged to and which groups they did not. For example, the early WVBF artists rejected a general concert dance label. Instead, they specifically identified themselves as ballet dancers. Artists’ personal and communal understandings of their artistic and social associations were historical products. Their identities shaped how they interacted with the world and conceptualized these interactions. WVBF artists were West Virginia dancers or dance teachers, and their identities were combinations of their regional lives and their participation in a national artistic community.\textsuperscript{18}

1968-1976 WVBF participants identified with one of three categories: West Virginia teachers, West Virginia students, or non-West Virginia guest artists hired by the festival administration to perform or teach. Interactions among and within these three groups shaped the

\textsuperscript{18} This thesis uses the same definition of concert or performance dance as the educational program \textit{Dance Sense}; concert dance must have a performer and an audience and is thus separated from recreational dance, which does not delineate between the two, KET \textit{Dance Sense}, “Understanding Dance,” September 15, 2011 (originally aired 2007); “Dance Students Attend Mini-Ballet Festival,” \textit{Bluefield Daily Telegraph}, October 10, 1976; “Beckley Art Group among Recipients: Arts and Humanities Council,” \textit{Post-Herald and Register}, June 22, 1975; Joan Wallach Scott, \textit{Gender and the Politics of History}, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4; 6-7; 25-26; 83-84; Hay, 2011.
WVBF culture and the West Virginia balletic community. Most WVBF attendees were students or teachers who lived and danced inside West Virginia and associated themselves with a particular in-state school. Their everyday lives were different from the out-of-state professional guests who taught and performed at the WVBF, but all WVBF attendees were balletic artists who worked within a nationalized balletic culture that was produced through the mid-century growth in concert dance.

Most West Virginia ballet teachers did not regularly work in professional capacities during the 1960s and 1970s, but several had received some professional training, danced professionally at one time, and/or frequently traveled outside the state to view professional dance. In contrast, WVBF out-of-state guests regularly trained with highly skilled artists in a specialized professional atmosphere. Their dancing and teaching consequently embodied the balletic styles they encountered, styles that were nationally prominent within the professional balletic world. Although many West Virginia teachers had encountered these professional approaches in some way, they were generally distanced from the professional balletic world. Nevertheless, their associations with performance dance fundamentally connected all WVBF participants to the balletic culture of the dance boom.19

WVBF artists combined their balletic and regional identities at festivals. Teachers formed a cooperative space for West Virginia artists to communicate, present choreography, participate in dance classes, observe professional performers, and interact with nationally recognized guest teachers. Relationships that developed within the WVBF structured the identities of attending artists. Interacting in this regionally and artistically-defined space allowed WVBF artists to change the shape and function of performance dance in West Virginia. Artists formed closer ties with the professional balletic world, and teachers introduced their students to

the possibility of pre-professional study. Their balletic identities meant that WVBF attendees were members of a balletic community that was simultaneously regional and national. Association with this community helped West Virginia teachers show their students a world of ballet that was a potential vocation rather than a part-time hobby. From 1968-1976, WVBF artists transformed what it meant to be a performance dance student or teacher in the state. Students who had not seen ballet performed outside of their regional school began to connect to a larger balletic community, while their teachers formed ties to their in-state and professional peers. Students began to see themselves as budding artists and teachers were reminded that they worked within a community that extended across the state and around the nation.

Creating a “Whole Different Mindset” through the West Virginia Ballet Festival

WVBF members promoted excellence in West Virginia concert dance and consequently expanded the potential implications of an Appalachian identity. They created an artistic West Virginia identity associated with high balletic standards rather than commercial underdevelopment and cultural stagnation/isolation. WVBF community members were influenced by their Appalachian-West Virginia culture, and they correspondingly distinguished themselves as having specific regionally based traits. In the 1960s West Virginia suffered from economic depression. Media attention and President Kennedy’s 1960 campaign helped nationally highlight this issue. Historian/sociologist Ronald Eller has noted that “Appalachia” signified “poor” in the national mind. Within the region itself, many communities embraced a shared sense of an Appalachian identity that carried interrelated cultural legacies and financial burdens. Eller wrote: “Increasingly, communities . . . came to recognize the similarities of their problems and heritage, and they began to share a new regional identity that bridged old political boundaries. Even the term Appalachia, which was rarely used in the region before the 1960s,
took on new pride . . .” Within the context of this cultural shift, festival participants struggled to fuse their regional and artistic identities. At WVBF events, they found communal and personal distinctions as artists who were also West Virginians.20

In the late 1960s Jerry Rose, founder and Chairman of the WVBF, was deeply involved in forming an identity that was simultaneously balletic and West Virginian. Rose was from Beckley, West Virginia and danced professionally in New York as a young man. When the dance company he worked for moved to Hong Kong, Rose and his wife Sherry decided to return to Beckley and open a dance school. Rose found that in West Virginia “dancing schools were interested only in their own recitals. So the material and the subject matter of the choreography was limited [and] a little less sophisticated than I’d been used to.” Rose wanted to be able to live in West Virginia and work as a committed balletic artist, yet this was not an easy goal for him to achieve. Ballet is a communal art, and a balletic artist cannot function without an artistic community. A teacher needs students, students need a teacher, performers need productions, and choreographers need performers. The expertise of a balletic community determines the quality of advice and criticism teachers can give and students can receive. Consequently, a balletic community produces dancers whose technical abilities correspond to the abilities of their teachers and peers.21


Rose encountered several independent performance dance schools, but “the [dance teachers] didn’t know each other, they knew of each other, but they never got together.” He remembered that in the late 1960s a few West Virginia teachers, such as Jean Dickinson of Huntington, were prominent but individualistic regional artists. There was no West Virginia dance community at this time. Rose explained that he and Sherry hoped to “change the attitude of people who attended and participated” in their school. He attempted to carry these changes beyond his classroom by recognizing and developing a shared artistic identity among West Virginia balletic artists.  

Rose asked West Virginia dance teachers to attend monthly meetings, and he organized their gatherings through the National Federation of Music Clubs (NFMC) Dance Department. The WVBF grew out of these assemblies, and the NFMC Dance Department became the official managerial title for the WVBF from 1968 through 1981. The NFMC was comprised of regional music clubs, and club participants competed for awards at district events. District winners were eligible to compete for national awards. The NFMC Dance Department was the performance dance division of the organization, and Rose used this division to provide the WVBF with an established organizational format. The artistic director of Rose’s former dance company introduced Rose to this association. Rose recounted that New Jersey NFMC Dance Department members “organized dance exams and a little festival with their different companies. So when I came back [to Beckley, West Virginia] . . . I sent out letters to all these people and said let’s get together and we would follow what they did in New Jersey . . .” Rose drew from the NFMC Dance Department model to initiate meetings between West Virginia teachers who were interested in forming a state festival. Meeting attendees worked toward the implementation of a

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22 Rose, 2010.
balletic state festival to promote the development of ballet in West Virginia. In May, 1968, these teachers held the first WVBF in Huntington, West Virginia.23

One of the teachers involved in the first WVBF was Velma Schrader, who owned and operated a ballet school in the Mid-Ohio Valley. She recalled that early festivals were managed exclusively by state teachers rather any professional administration. Although they used the NFMC title, teachers were not given specific administrative assistance from any outside group. Schrader was proud of the artistic dedication teachers showed when they worked to initiate the WVBF. She explained that the preliminary teacher conferences were for concert dance teachers who saw their work as a profession rather than a leisure pursuit. Meetings were almost exclusively concerned with purely balletic instruction, and the goal of these assemblies was to establish opportunities for West Virginia ballet students to further their training. Meeting locations shifted so dance teachers could share the travel time and expenses. Schrader described how she discovered the association through her local newspaper, saying:

It was a little article in our paper, “Beckley Theatre starts dance.” It was just made up of teachers . . . the West Virginia Federation of Music Clubs would sponsor it. [Rose] got them to sponsor it, [and] it had nothing to do with the state. . . . [The organization’s] goals were [to include] dedicated teachers that wanted to go beyond recreational dance, [and] to have an outlet for students that wanted to go into it more as a profession. Serious students . . . . I just fell in love with it from the very first meeting . . . . We were real close, the teachers were. . . . At the meeting they served a good dinner. Everybody showed what they could fix real good. I took them out (laughs). I wasn’t going have to cook, I’m not a cook.

Serving dinner added a social element to the ballet teachers’ gatherings and encouraged the groups’ unification. As a group, these teachers were able to clearly identify who they were

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(serious ballet teachers who wanted to establish suspended connections with the professional world) and who they were not (non-balletic and/or casual instructors).  

In 1968, the Huntington *Herald Dispatch* newspaper interviewed Rose concerning these monthly meetings. He observed that “day-long meetings are the first gesture to bring West Virginia teachers together for noncommercial purposes. Emphasis will be on creating a new artistic climate in which choreographers and dancers can work.” Two weeks after this publication, attending teachers held the first WVBF. In a *Herald Dispatch* entry written after the event Rose related the purpose of the festival, saying “the first Ballet Festival for the state . . . combin[ed] for students the professional training and inspiration for the hard years of work ahead . . .” Rose acknowledged the limitations of West Virginia students’ training but felt that the WVBF was a way for them to begin accessing professional training. Rose’s role as WVBF Chairman was upheld by the development of a statewide community of administering teachers. He referred to this in a 1968 newspaper interview when he said “plans for another and bigger festival next year will get under way as soon as spring recital season for the dance schools is completed.” WVBF in-state teachers continued to run their own schools as they attended pre-WVBF meetings, traveled to festivals with their students, and presented choreography in the festivals’ concerts. WVBF coordinators promoted their combined view of ballet as an artistic vocation as they worked in these varied capacities. When they planned the WVBF, managing teachers initiated the beginnings of a dynamic, extended, and ballet-centered performance dance community in West Virginia.  

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24 Schrader continues to teach in the Mid Ohio Valley as of this writing; Schrader, 2011; “Fourth Annual Ballet Festival Concert,” Huntington High School: West Virginia Dance Department, March 28, 1971.

The WVBF community was connected to a national performance dance community that had been solidified by the mid-century performance dance boom. Non-professional regional groups like the WVBF expanded this community by connecting with professional artists and attempting to raise the level of instruction their community could offer. The dance boom increased opportunities for concert dancers in the United States to work professionally, but professional ballet dancers needed talent, a particular type of physical body, and years of intensive training with a qualified teacher. The WVBF ballet teachers wanted to enable their students to realize the high level of talent, dedication, and training required to become a professional dancer at this time. They tried to give their students personal connections to the professional dance world. Each year, the WVBF brought in professional guest teachers and artists who demonstrated high professional standards in festival classes and performances. The WVBF used out-of-state guest artists and scholarship programs to establish connections to a national balletic community.26

The WVBF annual spring festivals centered around classes from non-West Virginia professional guest teachers. Festivals included evening performances of presentations by state schools and visiting professional performers. Guest artists awarded scholarships to help promising students attend pre-professional out-of-state summer programs. The WVBF was the first event to consistently bring West Virginian and non-West Virginian balletic artists together, and the interactive environment of the gathering encouraged artists to contribute to the cooperative, educational atmosphere.27

Watching, analyzing, and learning from professional ballet artists at the WVBF influenced the developing identities of young West Virginia students like Elizabeth Hay-Martin.

26 Sussman; Reynolds and McCormick, 506-507; 493-494; Homans, 467-469; Greskovic, 145-160; Rose, 2010.
As a student at Dickinson’s School of the Dance in Huntington, Hay-Martin regularly participated in the early WVBF events. She was deeply affected by her involvement with the WVBF and considered ballet as a potential career because of her experiences at the festivals. Hay-Martin felt that the new way of understanding and approaching ballet, which was encouraged by the WVBF environment, had a profound effect on her dance school community. She explained:

I believe that the intent with all of this was to raise the level of dance in West Virginia and it definitely, definitely has done that. . . . I don’t recall anybody ever going away to dance professionally [before the WVBF]. There might have been some, but it was very few and far between. So that’s what it created, I think. Just this whole different mindset and opportunity for sure.

Hay-Martin realized that the WVBF drastically altered how she and her peers approached ballet. She became aware of dance as a functioning art form in both the state and the nation. Hay-Martin thus gained maturity and became a young artist who intensively pursued ballet.28

The WVBF was an instrument that channeled the needs of ballet teachers and students in West Virginia. It was a means of forming an artistic community that enabled West Virginia artists to create new identities. The presence of professional teachers and guest artists at the WVBF encouraged students to compare themselves to the guests’ nationalized balletic standards in performance dance. Students subsequently viewed themselves as regional members of a national artistic dance community. Partly due to the professional guests, attendance at the WVBF gave individuals a sustained sense of collective artistic purpose. They gained the understanding that they were part of a group of people who understood and shared their balletic and regional comprehensions.

28 Dr. Elizabeth Hay-Martin, interview by Lauren Angel, Huntington West Virginia, July 21, 2011.
Professional Guests at the West Virginia Ballet Festival

Guest artists were a major part of the WVBF, and their presence connected the event to the broader, non-regional balletic culture. Guest performers showed students the technique and artistry of professional dance, whereas guest teachers helped students and their teachers understand pedagogic approaches that would help students improve. WVBF guest artists embodied a professional artistic identity that was young, energetic, and relatively approachable. They were often members of youth companies or part of fairly new regional groups. Youth companies were groups made up of young professional dancers gaining experience and honing their skills to prepare for possible entrance into larger professional companies. Regional companies were groups that operated in urban areas that were too small to compete with premier companies in major cities. The regional companies who performed and taught at the WVBF were usually located reasonably close to West Virginia. They included the Atlanta Ballet, the Cincinnati Ballet, and the Pennsylvania Ballet. Importantly, WVBF guest instructors were often affiliated with the schools that offered summer scholarships to WVBF students.29

The quality of professional dance technique, artistry, choreography, and costumes was habitually higher than that which was present in non-professional dance at this time. The style of professional concert dance was inclined to be quite different as well. Professional companies were dynamic members of a nationalized, professional concert dance community that generated specific choreographic trends. In a manner similar to fashionable clothing styles, professional concert dance produced renowned choreographers whose artistic approaches gradually

influenced the work of less-prominent groups. Guests at the WVBF thus exposed students and teachers to higher technical demands and nationally-supported artistic styles.\textsuperscript{30}

WVBF guest artists modeled professional balletic ability and identities for WVBF students, who worked with the visiting instructors in classes and performed in concert programs with the professional dancers. A 1972 newspaper article announced that festival students acquired “a keen insight into . . . the professionals who appeared on the dance recital.” The combined words and actions of the guests instructed students on how to behave in class and onstage. WVBF students studied balletic professionalism through casual exchanges with guest artists, student-teacher interactions, and watching professional artists perform. WVBF guest artists exhibited high skill levels and an awareness of the choreographic styles prominent in United States concert dance in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{31}

As students compared their own skills to the professional abilities of the WVBF guests, they attempted to emulate the technique and style that the guests showed. In 1969, seven members of the Pennsylvania Ballet performed, taught, and evaluated the WVBF participants. The simultaneous use of Pennsylvania Ballet members as guest teachers and performers reinforced the connection between high-quality training and the ability to perform as a professional dancer. In 1975, dancers from the Atlanta Ballet were guest artists in the concert. The company description in the concert program noted “it is the goal of the company to educate as well as entertain.” The group used devices like lecture demonstrations, which combined


\textsuperscript{31} “Ballet Festival comes to Huntington,” \textit{Herald Dispatch} March 26, 1972.
verbal lectures and physical performances, to focus on a combination of instruction and artistry.\textsuperscript{32}

The youth companies North Carolina Dance Theatre (NCDT) and Harkness Youth Dancers (HYD) both performed at the WVBF and offered scholarships to their affiliated summer programs. The NCDT was largely made up of dancers who had graduated from the associated North Carolina School of the Arts (NCSA). Students at the WVBF auditioned for scholarships to attend the NCSA. The NCDT used lecture demonstrations and other instructional programs to inform audience members while they watched the NCDT perform. Dancer Larry Harper had studied with Rose and was a member of the NCDT at this time. The use of the NCDT as guest artists for the 1974 and 1976 events thus reinforced the WVBF message that ballet was an artistic pursuit, which could potentially lead to a professional career. In 1976, members of the NCDT functioned as both guest teachers and performers, further reinforcing the connection between class and stage. The HYD was the junior company for the Harkness Ballet, a group known for mounting extensive tours and performing expensive but artistically uninteresting works. Program notes for the young company read “the Harkness Youth Dancers are a much needed new company of specially trained young professionals who will bring the magic of the ballet to areas where limited theatrical facilities cannot accommodate a large ballet company with traveling orchestra and elaborate scenery. . . .” Bringing youth and professionalism, this group embodied the first step WVBF students could hope to take into the professional world of concert dance.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} “Tonight at 8 o’clock: Ballet Performance at Park Junior High School”; “Beckley Dance Theatre to Participate in Eighth Ballet Festival: State’s Eighth Annual Ballet Festival in Beckley April 4-6”; “City Dancers Hold Festival”; “Eighth Annual Ballet Festival Concert.”

\textsuperscript{33} “Beckley Dancers to Perform at Ballet Festival,” Raleigh Register, March 24, 1974; “North Carolina Dance Theatre Weaves Beautiful Magic Spell,” Raleigh Register, November 17, 1974; “Seventh Annual Ballet Festival Concert Program,” Municipal Auditorium Charleston, West Virginia: West Virginia Dance Department, March 30, 1974; “Beckley Girl Wins a Dance Scholarship,” Raleigh Register April 4, 1974; “State Ballet Festival
Hay-Martin recalled that performing in a concert with professional artists as a young student influenced her perception of her balletic abilities. She highlighted a particular WVBF performance in which the guest performers noticed her group’s piece:

. . . . The professional dancers they brought in, they would perform at the very end . . . but they would be standing back stage with you when you went out. . . . There were a couple of little catty remarks coming from [the professional dancers], but then—[the remarks were] about the school in front of us—we started, and they quit talking.

I don’t remember what number we did or anything like that. I went on, and we all did our thing, and I came back, and one of the dancers said ‘man you’re really good.’ Like our studio was really good. It was great . . . It was exciting because we really stood out. . . . Everything that was reinforced to me was the quality of my training. So I can’t be thankful enough for that . . .

Witnessing the quality of dance that professional guests commanded was a key moment for WVBF students. Their observations could highlight the technical and artistic disparities that separated professional technique and their own capabilities. Conversely, student examination of professional work could reinforce the quality of their training. The WVBF provided an opportunity for students to measure the distance from their work to the professional world.34

Members of the Cincinnati Ballet were the WVBF guest artists in 1973. Four members of the company were also guest teachers for the 1973 Festival. Duncan Noble was a member of the NCSA faculty and was also a part of this troupe. Noble later formed an extensive and lengthy relationship with the West Virginia performance dance community. From 1981 until his death in 2002, Noble was a guest teacher for the West Virginia Dance Festival (WVDF) and a frequent visiting instructor/choreographer for the Parkersburg-area Schrader School of Ballet Arts. On separate occasions, Jerry Rose and West Virginia teacher Ella Hay emphasized that Noble was a consistent and enriching presence at festivals. Noble distributed scholarships for

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34 Hay-Martin, 2011.
the NCSA at the WVBF, and his decisions allowed recipients to access pre-professional study outside the state.35

Guest artists were a major factor linking the WVBF community to the national world of professional performance dance. Students learned from artists who embodied the level of training and dedication needed to bridge the gap between an acolyte and an artist. Guest teachers evaluated students, assessed their abilities, and awarded scholarships. They imparted their knowledge of ballet technique and artistry through their work with students in classes and scholarship examinations. Scholarship judges communicated their perceptions of the professional world by choosing the students they felt possessed the most professional potential. Noble and the other guest teachers influenced generations of students at the WVBF when they shaped students’ perceptions of the physical flexibility, technical capacity, and artistic talent they needed to access opportunities for pre-professional study. Guest performers personified professional artistry and showed WVBF students what they could potentially accomplish if they were gifted, willing, and able to devote themselves to intensive study.

**Forming Balletic Identities at the West Virginia Ballet Festival**

The WVBF solidified the connection between the festival and balletic education when it began offering scholarships to pre-professional summer programs at the 1970 Third Annual Ballet Festival. Students who received these WVBF scholarships were able to participate in pre-

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professional training programs with their non-regional peers. Such programs also offered students the possibility of accessing further pre-professional and study and perhaps even eventual entrance into professional ballet. The WVBF community had worked to carry out the scholarship initiative since the first event. According to a 1968 Herald Dispatch interview with Jerry Rose, the first festival planned a scholarship fund “to place more West Virginia dancers with promise in a position to obtain financial assistance.” The scholarship program distinguished WVBF students as growing young artists and potential professional dancers. Attendees were increasingly identified as balletic artists because it was possible for them to win a scholarship to study with other serious artists outside of the region. WVBF attendees’ greater recognition of themselves as balletic artists connected their regional and artistic associations. These associations also demonstrated the WVBF community’s concept of an identity that was simultaneously balletic and West Virginian.36

Debbie Novak was a student from the Dickinson School of the Dance in Huntington. Novak attended the WVBF as a young student, and she combined her regional and artistic associations when she expressed the isolation she felt as a West Virginia concert dancer in the 1960s:

We considered ourselves the top company in the state, whether we were or not... we just didn’t know what the rest of the state was doing and that goes back to the roads and the fact that we just couldn’t get to Beckley easily. We had interstate between Huntington and Charleston, but this [was] the era of one car families... .

It was a major trip to get fifty miles to Charleston. To get to Beckley, you had to go on the ‘West Virginia Thrill Ride,’ aka the Turnpike, which was three lanes. The passing lane was in the center around the curves, so if you got into that passing lane and there just happened to be a coal truck who was passing somebody else, well you’re cooked. There were always deaths and horrible things happening on the WV Turnpike, so you just generally stayed in one lane, single file to Beckley. So consequently, you just didn’t hop down and see what Jerry (Rose) was doing.

36 “Beckleyans to Attend State Ballet Festival Feb.28, March 1 at Charleston Civic Center,” Register and Post-Herald, February 14, 1970; “Ballet Festival Here April 28.”
Novak explained that the WVBF united West Virginia ballet schools at a single event. This created new conceptions of ballet in West Virginia for young WVBF students. It gave students an increased awareness of their balletic abilities as compared to their festival peers.\(^{37}\)

Beginning with the first 1968 Festival, the WVBF attempted to raise the level of West Virginia ballet with a structure that was both competitive and educational. A 1968 newspaper item read “dance studios . . . will be represented in the festival by leading students from each school.” At the WVBF these “leading students” learned through participation and observation. They also embodied the highest ability levels their schools could offer. WVBF students worked to positively represent their schools, themselves, and, by extension, their state.\(^{38}\)

In 1968 permission-only master classes increased the WVBF focus on evaluation and added to the growing professional standards for the festival students. Students underwent scored assessments, and a high score meant they could join the exclusive workshops. Beginning in 1970, the WVBF scholarship program furthered this comparative approach. It also expanded WVBF students’ developing comprehension of ballet to include a nationalized pre-professional perspective. A newspaper article from 1972 noted that “covered during the Festival were . . . examinations in which entrants were judged not in competition with one another but on a point system that would indicate their ability.” Guest judges pushed festival participants to go beyond comparing themselves to the West Virginia students surrounding them. The WVBF “point system” required adjudicators to assess students on a personalized scale they formed through their experiences as professional balletic performers and teachers. WVBF students became personally involved in the United States’ pre-professional world by participating in scholarship

\(^{37}\) Novak, 2011.

\(^{38}\) “Ballet Festival Here April 28.”
classes. Winners were able to further their pre-professional involvement by attending summer programs outside the state, some of which led to year-round training opportunities.\(^{39}\)

For a few students, the WVBF scholarship classes were their first steps on a journey to become a professional dancer. Rose explained that WVBF was highly influential because “people got to see [dance] was a viable vocation.” He remembered that “Duncan [Noble] took . . . several of my boys” to study at the NCSA. This atmosphere encouraged WVBF teachers and students to approach ballet with an increased seriousness and dedication. Rose stressed that “all those scholarships resulted in a lot of people making this a career.” Two of the boys from Rose’s school who received scholarships and became professional dancers, Peter and Paul Frame, were sons of a minister. In 1971, Peter won a scholarship after studying ballet for only three months, an extraordinary accomplishment. With his first WVBF scholarship, Peter attended the NCSA pre-professional summer program. He continued to receive scholarships to pre-professional programs through the WVBF, and returned to NCSA in 1972. The following year he won a scholarship to study at the Harkness House for Ballet Arts in New York City.\(^{40}\)

Peter Frame was an excellent example of the professional success a WVBF student could potentially achieve. In 1976, the Beckley Post-Herald quoted Rose in an article discussing the effect of the WVBF, the artistic community of the festival, and the WVBF goals. Rose commented that “past winners of these awards have gone on to become members of well-known ballet companies fulfilling the dreams of the festival founders.” When this article was published, it was not obvious which scholarship recipients Rose was referencing. But, later that month, the Beckley Post-Herald published another article revealing that Peter Frame had signed a contract

\(^{39}\) “Master Classes, Concert Today Feature first Festival of Ballet,” Herald Dispatch, April 28, 1968; “Ballet Festival Comes to Huntington.”

with the New York City Ballet (NYCB), one of the premier companies in the United States. Rose, Frame’s first dance teacher, declared that signing a contract with the NYCB was “the greatest height you can reach in American dance.” Rose asserted his pleasure in Frame’s success through his position as Frame’s teacher and his pride in the developments made by West Virginia ballet through the WVBF. Frame’s association with the WVBF community facilitated his maturation from a ballet student in West Virginia to a professional dancer with the NYCB. His talent was fostered through WVBF scholarships and his education under Rose, a leading member of the WVBF community. In 1975, Frame turned down an offer to study with the prestigious American Ballet Theatre in New York City, choosing instead to perform in West Virginia Grandview State Park outdoor summer production series. Frame’s decision suspended his pre-professional balletic education but allowed him to temporarily return to an Appalachian artistic environment. This choice demonstrated his connection to the balletic community formed by the WVBF.41

Peter’s brother Paul was also set on a path to professional dance through the WVBF but, unlike his brother, Paul did not regularly return to West Virginia as a professional dancer. Paul received a WVBF scholarship to study at the NCSA in 1973. Later, he also danced professionally with the NYCB. After performing with the company for ten years, Paul suffered a severe back injury. Following chiropractic care, Paul chose to become a chiropractor himself. In his capacity as a medical professional, he worked with Ballet Arizona dancers, thereby continuing his association with concert dance.42

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Like the Frame brothers, Hay-Martin found opportunities to be seen by well-qualified, non-regional teachers at the WVBF. She stated that a balletic career “was never considered an option before that,” and remembered that the WVBF emphasis on education and the professionalization of performance dance changed the pervading culture of her dance school. She explained:

My mother never would have thought of sending me away at fifteen years old, much less at twelve or thirteen, so it created a whole different mindset. . . . A girlfriend of mine and I, we both went [to the NCSA]. We went for the summer, and it was a wonderful experience, I loved it down there. . . . but we were the first two who did that in [our dance school], who had even gone to a summer program . . . After that, when they started having auditions, that’s when the girls that were coming up and younger than us, they got a lot more opportunity to be seen [by professional teachers] and it changed the mindset [to] you’ve got to start now, you have to do it now. . . .

Hay-Martin emphasized the lasting effect ballet had on her life and personal development, asserting that it helped her work ethic throughout her life. The WVBF community consistently reinforced the idea that performance dance required commitment and discipline. This concept helped build individual identities in an extended community of WVBF artists.43

Novak studied with Hay-Martin at the Dickinson School of the Dance in Huntington and also recalled being influenced by an increasingly rigorous atmosphere. Novak understood the scholarship program at the WVBF to be a crucial aspect of the festival and stated “. . . we all wanted to win scholarships. I was in the scholarship audition every year. Mrs. Dickinson said everybody is going to take it, everybody is going to take the class . . .” Novak did not win a scholarship through the WVBF, but she continued her dance training as a college student in New York and was active in professional theater. She emphasized the increased employability her concert dance abilities brought her in musical theater productions:

I got out of school, and I got the first bus and truck tour of Jesus Christ Superstar like that, (snaps) because I could sing and I could act and I could dance. I understudied Mary

43 Hay-Martin, 2011.
and did one of the Judas tormentors’ roles, which you needed a double pirouette for, and I had it at that point. So [ballet technique] just made me highly employable, and I did three years of nothing but tours, one right after the next . . .

Novak observed the lasting effect of performance dance in her life when, after twenty-six years away from dance, “I just came back and one day . . . and I said I wonder if I could do a développé to seconde and I just did it in the mirror. I can still do that. . . . I’ve learned a lot about my body . . . I have to come to terms with a few things—that I am patched together, but I’ll do it.” An Emmy Award winning documentary filmmaker, Novak also directed the film Steven Caras: See Them Dance, which concerned a NYCB dancer who became a renowned dance photographer. Through the WVBF and Dickinson School of the Dance, in professional musical theater, as an adult dancer returning to ballet, and through the lens of documentary film, performance dance has been present throughout Novak’s life.44

Peter and Paul Frame, Hay-Martin, and Novak are examples of the effects the WVBF community had on its students from 1968-1977. The community’s educational and artistic emphasis was demonstrated through examinations, master classes, and scholarships. This created an extended artistic community that connected the teachers and students of WVBF to a national community. As WVBF teachers consistently communicated the idea that ballet was a serious art form, WVBF students felt these effects. Some students received scholarships to study at pre-professional programs through the WVBF and some went on to become professional ballet dancers. Other students did not become professional ballet dancers but, like Hay-Martin and Novak, continued to feel the influence of the WVBF artistic community throughout their lives.

Hay-Martin conveyed the personal impact of this when she remembered the large amount of time and energy she invested in her dance training:

... I probably spent as many hours dancing as I did in school. It was wonderful. It’s really what kept me levelheaded and my mind clear for school... that’s what it has always done for me. I am so thankful that I didn’t quit. I’m so thankful that I wasn’t a cheerleader because of... the discipline [dance] gave me throughout the rest of my life. That’s what I’m the most thankful for. Even though I don’t dance now, and I really miss it, it’s still really ingrained as a part of me... the discipline of dance, the discipline of ballet. So that’s the thing I’ll always remember about it. That’s the best thing...  

Conclusion

In 1975 the WVBF community was both large enough and well-established enough to form a “Mini-Festival” or “Mini-Fest.” The Mini-Fest was essentially a much smaller version of the WVBF, which took place during the fall instead of the spring. Students took classes from in-state WVBF teachers and, initially, there were no performances or scholarships at the event. The formation of a secondary yearly festival demonstrated that the WVBF community was strong enough to support smaller endeavors in addition to its large spring event. The event was collectively run by a group of West Virginia teachers. Rose continued to be a major figure in this festival, as well as at the WVBF.  

In 1977, the Cultural Center administration in Charleston began to hold a fall festival, and the WVBF community underwent a major shift. Despite being officially separate from the WVBF, this event was intrinsically linked to the WVBF community. The WVBF held a spring festival in 1977 on the Marshall University Huntington campus. Guest artists distributed five scholarships to the NCSA and the Dallas Ballet summer program. Nevertheless, the center of the West Virginia performance dance community had begun to shift to the Cultural Center WVDF.  

The organizers of the WVBF delineated between ballet and other forms of dance. The organization provided scholarships to help students attend pre-professional ballet programs, 

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46 “Dance Students Attend Mini-Ballet Festival.”  
hired balletic guest teachers and artists for festivals, and promoted the balletic art. The Cultural Center WVDF shifted this focus to include varied types of West Virginia performance dance. The administration behind the WVDF built on the artistic community formed by the WVBF to create a federally and state-funded, professionally-managed event.

Jerry Rose noted that a major motivation behind the creation of the WVBF was the organizing teachers’ desire to present pieces for a community that was culturally literate in a very specific sense. He explained that the creation and involvement of this community was personally important for him. Presenting choreography at WVBF performances gave Rose a different kind of exposure, which I enjoyed, and I like seeing other people’s work too. . . I’ve always had this feeling that maybe when you live [in West Virginia] you’re sort of like stepchildren, you know, the people don’t recognize what you do. I just wanted to say to the world, ‘hey, we have intelligence and we can manufacture stories and art just as well as anybody, especially people living in Ohio (laughs).

Rose understood that many people did not recognize non-professional regional groups as a connected element of the United States mid-century dance culture. The WBVF community, however, understood balletic terminology, trained students for pre-professional study, and was aware of the rewards and demands involved in performance dance. The festival community was consequently a non-professional product of a dance boom movement that also created prominent professional groups. The WVBF built a community of individual artists whose cultural associations were regionally and balletically based. In 1975 these artists began attending the Mini-Fest, and in 1977 they began participating in the WVDF. These events incorporated and modified the WVBF identity while continuing to promote a community of West Virginia concert dance artists.48

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Chapter Two

“For a Dancer”: Developing the West Virginia Dance Festival, 1977-1981

“While I was on the National Association of Regional Ballet board, I got to know [renowned British ballet teacher] David Howard. . . . We became very good friends. So I said to David ‘Would you consider coming to West Virginia for a dance festival?’ And, he said, ‘You want me to go where? . . . I’ve never heard of West Virginia!’ I said, ‘Oh, come on, David. You’ll like it.’”

1977-1981 was a period of intense transition that implemented significant changes within the WVBF artistic community. The West Virginia Division of Culture and History (DCH) founded the West Virginia Dance Festival (WVDF) in 1977. From 1977-1980 the WVDF and the WVBF operated as distinct events, with the WVDF taking place in the spring and the WVBF taking place in the fall. In 1981 administrators scheduled the WVBF and the WVDF at the Charleston, West Virginia Cultural Center during the same week. In 1982 however, the WVBF did not take place. The WVDF thus became the sole major dance festival in the state. Beginning in 1977, the professionally-administered WVDF was held each year at the state Cultural Center in Charleston. Because it was coordinated by a professional staff rather than the in-state teachers, the Cultural Center festivals brought increased professionalism and dance-specific educational initiatives to the West Virginia concert dance community.

West Virginia state sponsorship of the WVDF was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The NEA was a federal program that aided performing and visual art

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49 Dr. Norman Fagan, interview by Lauren Angel, Barboursville, West Virginia, August 18, 2010.
50 “The Division of Culture and History Presents State Dance Festival,” West Virginia State Theater, West Virginia: The Division of Culture and History, October 4-9, 1977; Dr. Norman Fagan Commissioner of Culture and History to Dancers March 16, 1981, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, March 16, 1981; Dr. Norman Fagan Commissioner of Culture and History to Dancers April 16, 1982, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, April 16, 1982.
through grants and other programs. It was created by the federal government in 1965 and was a major source of financial help for professional dance companies and prominent choreographers. Many of the key characteristics of the dance boom, such as international tours and nationally televised dance programs, were supported with NEA grants. The NEA also encouraged state efforts to initiate and assist “dance activity.” Because there was no professional company in West Virginia, the West Virginia DCH was able to use NEA funds to form an educational event that served the state schools and troupes.51

Dr. Norman Fagan was the first commissioner of the West Virginia DCH and the founder of the WVDF. Beginning with the first event in 1977, Fagan set the direction for the Cultural Center festivals. As he managed these events, he asked for advice from Jerry Rose, the Chairman of the WVBF. Fagan used the WVBF as a base from which to create the WVDF, but he also introduced modifications to the yearly festivals. He tied the event to the national dance community by continuing the WVBF use of professional guest artists, helping WVDF teachers access NEA grants, and associating West Virginia concert dance with the national dance community.52

Cultivating West Virginia Concert Dance through the West Virginia Dance Festival

Fagan fell in love with West Virginia in the mid-1960s when he came to the state to work with the outdoor drama Honey in the Rock. After living in New York and Pittsburgh where, he recalled, life was “zoom, zoom, zoom,” friendly people and church suppers convinced him to stay in West Virginia. While working on this production, Fagan was offered the opportunity to become the first director of the West Virginia Arts Council:

There was a movement to start arts councils throughout the country. Federal government passed a law creating the National Endowment for the Arts, and they offered each state a non-matching grant of fifty thousand dollars if they would create a state arts’ agency. Governor Hulett Smith had just gone into office, and he was on my board and he asked me what I thought of it, and I said that I think we should do it. So he caused legislation to be introduced creating it . . . and then he asked me if I would be the director of the Arts Council.

Fagan’s new position required him to explore the arts scene in West Virginia. He had to understand the art and artists already operating in the state in order to conceptualize how best to assist them.  

Fagan met Rose when he worked with *Honey in the Rock*. Rose was dancing in the show, and Fagan was so impressed with his abilities he eventually asked him to become the show choreographer. Rose introduced Fagan to West Virginia concert dance, and his explanations of dance in the state informed Fagan’s own comprehensions. Fagan also knew Andre Van Damme, the director and founder of the Charleston Ballet troupe and school. Fagan explained that Van Damme was a vital feature of West Virginia concert dance, but his vision was centered on the Charleston Ballet. Rose however, had a much broader outlook, and Fagan referred to him as the “Mr. Dance” of West Virginia. In many ways, Fagan’s WVDF continued what Rose’s direction of the WVBF had begun. Although they had significant differences, both events were primarily focused on education and professionalization.

Fagan saw serious disparities between the West Virginia dance groups. He found a handful of well qualified teacher-choreographers but discovered there were “sixty or seventy of Miss Blanche’s School of Tap, Baton, and Ballet” types of schools. Fagan was shocked at the largely unprofessional atmosphere pervading West Virginia concert dance schools. He “saw

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these people [dance teachers] taking these kids and destroying them because they didn’t even understand the child’s body.” Investigating further, Fagan was astonished to learn that West Virginia required a professional degree and current license for someone to legally cut hair, yet anyone could teach children physical and potentially dangerous dance classes. West Virginia, like other states, had no legal licensing system for dance teachers. Fagan understood that lack of regulation in concert dance was widespread, but he felt that the lack of professional training in West Virginia was also particular to the state. Fagan believed that helping teachers increase the level of training they offered was the most effective way for him to improve West Virginia concert dance.55

In his attempts to develop teachers’ abilities, Fagan centralized the geographic and communal associations of West Virginia artists. Fagan hoped that this focus would influence West Virginia concert dance as a whole. Yet he also recognized that “in their little communities” West Virginia dance teachers were “heroes.” Consequently, he had to be careful not to criticize their work overtly. Fagan understood state teachers’ identities to be closely tied to their West Virginia homes and the status they held in their towns. He wanted to institute dance-centered educational initiatives in the state to improve their abilities, but he risked insulting and ostracizing the West Virginia performance dance community by implying these teachers needed to develop their skills.56

Fagan faced a difficult undertaking and, before implementing any changes, he left West Virginia for several years in order to work as an arts administrator in Washington, DC. He

55 Fagan, 2010; Robert Greskovic discusses nationalized and gendered categorical ballet training, writing “some systems, such as the school of the Paris Opera, include eight-year-olds. Many smaller schools and individual teachers take students even younger, but these individuals must work with extreme care not to stress the child’s delicately developing muscles and bones. (Unfortunately, some still do not, to disastrous results to legs and feet.)” Robert Greskovic, Ballet 101: A Complete Guide to Learning & Loving the Ballet (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 147.

initially became the Director of Education at the Kennedy Center and then worked as the Director for Performing Arts and Public Media Programs at the National Endowment for the Arts. Fagan returned to Charleston in the mid-1970s and became the director of the newly-formed Cultural Center. Stressing the novelty of his position, Fagan emphasized that the excitement was overwhelming: “There was no precedent for it. There were no previous programs. It existed nowhere else in the country. Nobody else had a state cultural center. . .” Fagan’s new job came with an appropriately distinguished title, suitable for the Cold War era. Smiling, he confessed “I was appointed Commissioner of Culture and History, which sounds like something out of Russia.”

Fagan was able to create entirely new agendas through his role as Commissioner. He was excited to encourage West Virginia cultural programs that could be showcased at the Cultural Center building, and he produced events that highlighted art from around the state. A very successful example of Fagan’s efforts was the Vandalia Gathering. This festival showcased folk traditions such as bluegrass music and storytelling. Yet the WVDF was different from this purely celebratory event. The WVDF exposed the state artists to professional work and encouraged them to raise their artistic standards. Fagan served on the board of the National Association of Regional Ballet (NARB), an association that supported regional professional dance companies with festivals and conferences. He felt that his regional administration was connected to a national artistic community and wanted WVDF artists to explore their connections to this community. Fagan believed that folk traditions were untouchable, an art form he could exhibit but could not influence. He believed that concert dance was malleable, and he wanted to help West Virginia artists meet the standards of their national peers. To do this, he used what he referred to as “cross-pollination.” He encouraged West Virginia artists to

explore the work of their in-state and national artistic peers and hoped that this would inspire artists to raise the level of their own work. Through the WVDF, artists deepened their relationships with the national dance community but retained their specific regional associations as well.58

The West Virginia Ballet Festival merges with the West Virginia Dance Festival

The WVBF association of teacher-choreographers directed the small dance festival or “Mini-Fest” in 1975. West Virginia teachers taught the varied classes and, unlike the larger event, performances were not included in the Min-Fest. The fall Mini-Fest was an educational supplement to the larger festival, which took place in the spring. In 1981, West Virginia dance teachers filed articles of incorporation for DanceWV, the Mini Fest organizing nonprofit corporation. This was also the year West Virginia ballet teachers held the WVBF for the last time. The Mini-Fest perpetuated the collective approach of the WVBF as the WVDF became the main gathering for the West Virginia performance dance community. The WVBF was headed by Rose, and other ballet teachers and their spouses also helped administer the event. When the professionally-administered WVDF became the major dance festival in the state, the Mini-Fest retained a communal setup. The WVDF did not offer scholarships for out-of-state study. Instead, the comprehensive emphasis of the state festival attempted to improve West Virginia concert dance in the region as a whole. The Mini-Fest retained a WVBF-style scholarship program and continued the WVBF commitment to developing individual West Virginia concert

dancers. It celebrated students who had the potential to compete in the out-of-state professional dance world.\textsuperscript{59}

Fagan’s definition of the West Virginia concert dance community was exemplified in his endeavors to improve and professionalize dance in the state. He came to West Virginia concert dance as an administrator who attempted to fulfill the combined needs of all West Virginia artists. The WVBF/Mini-Fest helped individually talented ballet students enter the competitive dance world outside the state, but the WVDF tried to comprehensively improve the abilities of all West Virginia concert dancers. As it developed into the dominant dance festival in West Virginia, the WVDF offered a professional administration and hierarchal leadership style. With a shifting location and informal supervisory organization, the Mini-Fest used a dissimilar grassroots setup. The yearly spring WVDF defined West Virginia concert dancers’ identities through their regional affiliations and an audition-like adjudication process that classified students’ technical ability levels. This structure was juxtaposed with the fall Mini-Fest, which gave teachers the ability to place their students in class levels by asking teachers to choose these rankings prior to the event.\textsuperscript{60}

As he managed the WVDF, Fagan attempted to precisely define the West Virginia concert dance community and determine the most effective ways to serve this community in its entirety. The mandatory adjudication process was one of the ways in which Fagan assessed WVDF artists. Fagan used this method to review and critique the WVDF groups, determine the order of festival performances, and assign class level placements. The WVDF required groups to participate in adjudications but kept these potentially embarrassing sessions private. Fagan

\textsuperscript{59} Compared to the WVBF moreover, significantly fewer newspaper articles were published concerning the Mini-Fest, “Dance Students Attend Mini-Ballet Festival,” \textit{Bluefield Daily Telegraph}, October 10, 1976; DanceWV Articles of Incorporation, December 31, 1981, DanceWV, Inc., private collection.

\textsuperscript{60} “Dance Students Attend Mini-Ballet Festival”; DanceWV Articles of Incorporation.
remembered that the adjudicating guest artists “weren’t brutal, but they were very honest.” He observed that artists’ interactions with guest artists were educational for both West Virginia teachers and students. Adjudications were a means of highlighting students’ inadequacies, and by extension, their teachers’ shortcomings. Fagan hoped such direct feedback would draw attention to the educational needs of West Virginia concert dancers but remained concerned that evaluations might alienate the state performance dance community. The Cultural Center festival addressed this issue by offering to cover group travel and lodging expenses. Fagan felt this would encourage attendance, and indeed, over twenty groups were present at the first WVDF. These groups returned regularly throughout Fagan’s twelve-year tenure.  

Fagan believed that corrective interactions with guest teachers were a crucial and successful aspect of the WVDF. Teachers were eager to learn how they could improve their student’s work, and Fagan explained that, when faced with corrections, the teachers “God bless them, instead of going off in a huff, would say, ‘How can you help me?’” Guest artists then suggested that teachers ask Fagan to show them how to apply for NEA/DCH grants to bring guest teachers into their schools. When guest teachers adjudicated the WVDF students, they initiated exchanges that sometimes led to extended relationships. Teachers gained a comprehension of their shortcomings through the adjudication process, and they learned how to improve their abilities when they hired guest teachers to visit their schools. This double-headed approach was how Fagan attempted to initiate serious changes in West Virginia concert dance.  

Defining the “West Virginia” in the West Virginia Dance Festival

WVDF regional teacher Ella Hay brought her Huntington-area students to early WVDF events. She recalled a particular student who struggled to reconcile her artistic and regional identities. This student became a professional dancer with a Cincinnati-based company and may have been the first from Hay’s school to leave the state and dance professionally. Hay’s student attempted to reject her regional associations completely in favor of her professional artistic identity. When she performed on tour with her company in Ashland, Kentucky, she was too embarrassed to tell her peers that she had grown up thirty minutes away. She later apologized to Hay, rationalizing that the other girls in the company would have teased her endlessly if she had told them her hometown was Huntington, West Virginia. In the eyes of her professional peers, Hay’s student believed she could be a dancer or a West Virginian but not both. She separated her regional and artistic identities and could not conceive of how she could combine these in a way that her professional community would accept.63

Members of the WVDF community differentiated between the performance dance embraced by these festivals and “traditional,” recreational Appalachian dance. Fagan and Rose explicitly distinguished between WVDF concert dance and the folk dance of a yearly DCH festival called the Vandalia Gathering. Fagan described the Vandalia Gathering as an event that was “all about involving the entire community” but noted the WVDF was purposefully closed to the public. He wanted to use dancers’ “clannish” instincts to encourage them to see themselves as part of a state and a national community. Rose also saw concert dance as very different from folk dance, but he asserted that concert dance was influenced by artists’ regional identities. WVDF artists were cultural products who were formed by West Virginia social atmospheres.

63 Ella Hay, interview by Lauren Angel, Huntington, West Virginia, June 16, 2011.
The concert dance they produced was therefore West Virginia dance. This classification complicated definitions of West Virginia and Appalachian dance and culture.\(^\text{64}\)

The Appalachian region has a long history of stereotypical images. One of the most persistent of these images was the concept of Appalachian exceptionalism, meaning that Appalachia was significantly different from the rest of the nation due to a lack of socioeconomic development and progress, regional isolation, and a flawed culture. This theory stemmed from the incorrect idea that Appalachia has historically been segregated from the rest of the United States, resulting in a stagnant culture capable of preserving traditional art forms but incapable of producing innovative art. The concert dance performed at the WVDF was artistic dance. The WVDF artists were shaped by their West Virginia lives, yet the dance styles they embraced were based on the same techniques as concert dance performed across the country at this time. Like Hay’s student who hid her regional identity from her professional peers, WVDF artists struggled to form an identity that united their regional and artistic selves.\(^\text{65}\)

Beginning with the first 1977 event, the Cultural Center staff tried to encourage an identity that was both artistic and West Virginian by connecting the WVDF community to

\(^{64}\) The terms “traditional”, “traditional dance,” and “traditional arts” are being used in this context to refer to Appalachian arts which have commonly been understood to be traditional. The reality, of course, is that many of these “traditional” art forms have been shaped and constructed by non-Appalachians. See Henry Shapiro, \textit{Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press Chapel Hill, 1978); David Whisnant, \textit{All that is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Jane Becker, \textit{Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Bill Malone, “Music” in \textit{High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place}, ed. Richard Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana: University of Chicago, 2004); The educational program \textit{Dance Sense} clarified the types of dance, separating recreational (or social) and artistic dance. The program noted that artistic dance divides dancers and audience, while recreational dance does not. Recreational dance celebrates and enhances social ties, while artistic dance makes a dancer into a performer and an observer into an audience member; KET \textit{Dance Sense}, “Understanding Dance,” September 15, 2011 (originally aired 2007). Fagan, 2010; Jerry Rose, interview by Lauren Angel, Beckley, West Virginia, August 27, 2010.

artistic influences outside of West Virginia in consistent and meaningful ways. The professional company Dan Wagoner and Dancers were reoccurring guest teachers and performers at the event. Their company was located in New York City, but Dan Wagoner was originally from Springfield, West Virginia, a point the WVDF stressed in their advertisements. Fagan’s use of guest artist with links to West Virginia demonstrated his attempt to develop and support the idea that artists could retain their West Virginia identities while achieving a high level of technique and artistry.66

Dan Wagoner further encouraged an artistic regional identity through his work as a guest teacher in the state. In addition to the yearly WVDF, NEA/DCH grants regularly brought Dan Wagoner into individual West Virginia dance schools. He was thereby able to forge deeper connections with West Virginia dancers. Wagoner used this close educational contact to maintain ties with the West Virginia concert dance community while he fostered his professional career in New York. At the 1980 WVDF, the West Virginia University dance ensemble Orchesis performed “Orange Blossom Special,” which was choreographed by Wagoner. The music in this work did not have a listed composer and neither did several of the works performed at WVDF events by Wagoner’s company. WVDF programs cataloged this music as “traditional” or “traditional folk songs and tunes,” which showcased Wagoner’s use of American-Appalachian themes for his choreographic and artistic inspiration.67

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In 1984, a *New York Times* review recognized that Wagoner’s work “‘Round this World, Baby Mine’” had a distinctly regional flair. The review described the “spirited hoedown vigor” in the work. A *Ballet News* article published the same year gave an in-depth discussion of Wagoner and his company. It read: “Back in West Virginia’s Allegheny mountains, Wagoner’s family lived with country things in a simple style echoing a pioneer life. The youngest of ten children, Wagoner wanted to dance. ‘There was no precedent for that in Springfield, West Virginia,’ he says. ‘I didn’t even know for a long time that you could do it as a profession.’” Wagoner referenced the unusual path that he chose as a boy growing up in West Virginia in the mid-twentieth century. He knew that he had to leave the state and move to New York City in order to become a professional dancer. Yet, even as a professional choreographer living in New York, Wagoner retained the regional influences of his childhood. Although his company was based in New York City, Wagoner’s art was based in West Virginia.  

Joseph Holloway was another performer who merged an Appalachian and a professional concert dance identity. Originally from Wheeling, West Virginia, Holloway was a professional dancer residing in New York. He was a guest performer at the 1977 Cultural Center Festival. A DCH performance listing for 1977-1978 underscored that Holloway and Wagoner lived in New York City but were originally from West Virginia. These professional dancer-choreographers were the Cultural Center administration’s living examples of high-achieving West Virginian artists. Holloway and Wagoner showed WVDF students how to maintain their West Virginia identities while attaining a high professional standard. The WVDF made continuous efforts to

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increase the training available inside the state and connect advancement in performance dance with artists’ regional associations.\(^69\)

The WVDF community was made up of teacher-choreographers and students living and dancing inside West Virginia. Yet membership in this community was not simply an empty label gained through in-state residency. Geographic and cultural associations shaped the artistic identities of West Virginia teacher-choreographers and dancers. Professional choreographer Katherine Kramer explained that “you get ideas from life. So you can get inspiration for choreography by watching . . . how people move down a street or how a flock of birds are flying through the sky. [Artistic inspiration is] all around you.” Choreographic concepts, the stimuli motivating dancers’ performances, and the experiences informing teachers’ educational methods were culturally specific. Individuals’ identities were produced through their regional and cultural associations, and artists’ comprehensions of their identities were primary components of their artistic works. Members of the WVDF community were teachers, choreographers, students, and performers. They were also West Virginians who embodied their regional and artistic communities.\(^70\)

**Observation and Participation at the West Virginia Dance Festival**

The shift from a focused balletic festival to a generalized performance dance festival brought extensive changes to the festival and its community. Most notable was the transition from a gathering coordinated by dance teachers and their spouses to a gathering administered by Cultural Center staff members. The DCH’s professional staff institutionalized festivals and brought them under the scope of a state governmental association. Hay remembered that

\(^69\) The Division of Culture and History Performers, FY ‘78–Cities and Counties Listing, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, 1977-1978.

\(^70\) KET *Dance Sense*, “Making Dance,” October 20, 2011 (originally aired 2007).
Cultural Center staff members made a conscious effort to stay informed of dance teachers’ opinions. Nevertheless, the new administration altered the roles of West Virginia teachers involved in festivals. After the WVBF declined in 1981, teachers could effect change far less directly than in previous years. They became administrative observers rather than participators.  

Instead of coordinating the event as a cohesive, interconnected group, teachers’ voices at the WVDF were heard only through discussions with Cultural Center administrators and occasional questionnaire forms. Conversely, a state funded administration offered the artistic community stability and a particular sense of detached freedom as well. Distanced from the obligation of planning and implementing a major yearly event, dance teachers could rely on the Cultural Center staff to coordinate a festival in which their sole responsibility was ensuring that their schools participated in the events. The dance teachers’ lack of administrative responsibility meant more time to concentrate on their individual schools and students but little to no control over their festivals’ structure. Initially, this shift brought major alterations to the festival format. The WVBF was a highly participatory event. All students took classes from guest teachers and performed in the WVBF concert, but in 1980 most groups were only able to observe the WVDF activities.

Although the Cultural Center administration wanted to reduce educational disparities in the West Virginia dance community, the 1980 WVDF highlighted groups’ artistic inequalities.

Cultural Center Events Coordinator Nancy Hindsley sent a letter to West Virginia dance groups

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stating that the event would include performances by “outstanding West Virginia performers.” Most groups were not given opportunities to physically dance at the festival. The event format allowed groups that were not “outstanding” to interact only by speaking with each other, rather than dancing together in classes. Hindsley’s letter announced: “In addition to a desire to show the public the talent that is present in our state in the field of dance, we wanted to provide you, the dancers and dance groups of our state, with a forum for exchanging your views and ideas with each other.” The letter expressed an attempt by the Cultural Center staff to identify issues significant to the West Virginia concert dance community.73

The endeavor by the WVDF administration to understand the concerns of the WVDF attendees certainly contributed to the establishment of the WVDF within the West Virginia performance dance community, yet the Cultural Center administration did not immediately launch a completely successful event. The inactive structure used in the 1980 WVDF did provide an opportunity for members of the West Virginia dance community to enjoy performances by “outstanding” West Virginia groups and out-of-state professional artists and to discuss problems and ideas with their peers. Tangible opportunities to take classes from guest teachers or perform for attending colleagues did not, however, exist for most attendees. They were able to watch presentations but unable to actually dance. As a teacher, Hay believed that dance students’ direct, physical involvement was vital. She accentuated the primacy of actively taking class, and maintained “the kids want to be in class, they want to dance, and they don’t want to watch a film, they can rent films. All this information is out there now . . .” She commented that the WVDF tried implementing a number of different educational activities at festivals. Few were as effective, and none were as valuable to students as actual dance classes.

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73 Nancy Hindsley Events Coordinator to Dance Instructors, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, March 10, 1980.
Participation is the defining characteristic of concert dance. The art form distinguishes between performer and audience, separating them into distinct categories. The 1980 WVDF therefore categorized its few contributing dancers as “artists” and all other attendees as “observers.”

In 1981, the Cultural Center administration attempted to create an inclusive gathering for West Virginia concert dance artists, and both the WVDF and WVBF used the Cultural Center facilities on the same week. Cultural Center documents referred to the 1981 event as “Dance Week” or “Dance Festival Week.” Although the WVDF and WVBF were officially separate, their administrators evidently felt it was in their interest to hold their events jointly. The Cultural Center attempted to serve all members of the West Virginia concert dance community by creating a cohesive dance event through this gathering, and the WVDF format became much more participatory at this combined event. The transformation was almost certainly a result of uniting the Cultural Center festival and the WVBF. A letter by Fagan welcomed dancers to the WVDF/WVBF and announced this gathering would include participatory classes. This indicated a fundamental change in the event’s approach. The modification helped the WVDF prosper as an educational festival serving the West Virginia performance dance teachers and students. The 1981 WVDF poster declared “our world is dance.” It showed dancers of different styles bursting out from behind the WVDF logo and sent the message that the WVDF was the place where all West Virginia dancers belonged.

Conclusion

The WVDF became the foremost dance festival in the state in 1982. The WVBF no longer existed, and, although the Mini-Fest was held during this period, it consistently attracted fewer participants than the WVDF. In certain respects, Cultural Center festivals resembled the former WVBF at this point. Both offered multiple opportunities for direct physical participation; students participated in classes, and most groups presented a work in one of the nightly performances. Additionally, the 1982 WVDF employed professional guest teachers to adjudicate performance pieces and teach classes. Yet unlike the WVBF, the WVDF included varied performance dance styles, was coordinated by a professional administration, and did not distribute scholarships.  

The Cultural Center WVDF administration allowed members of the West Virginia concert dance community the freedom to focus on their art rather than the coordination of a substantial yearly event. The Cultural Center administration provided West Virginia dance groups with a stable, professional organization they could rely on to manage the WVDF, an

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event comparable to the WVBF. Yet this professional administration also removed the members of the West Virginia dance community from the process of shaping the WVDF format and choosing the WVDF guest teachers and artists. Members of the West Virginia concert dance community ran the Mini-Fest through the organization DanceWV, but this event remained secondary to the larger WVDF. The continued success of the WVDF after 1981 was chiefly due to continuous efforts by the Cultural Center administration to stay informed of the problems and concerns of the West Virginia dance community, but the performance dance community that had been formed by the WVBF nevertheless changed drastically at this time.

Fagan defined West Virginia concert dance and its community members through the WVDF. Members of this community were shaped by both their regional and their artistic identities. Concert dance in West Virginia became increasingly aligned with national trends in performance dance through the WVDF use of guest artists and distribution of NEA/DCH grants. From 1977 through 1981, the WVDF and the Mini-Fest consistently attempted to fill the needs of a West Virginia concert dance community that was technically varied and regionally and artistically identified. After 1981, the WVDF and the Mini-Fest sustained dissimilar organizational styles, and members of the West Virginia concert dance community regularly attended both events. As the DCH also continued to administer the WVDF, it served an artistic community that was becoming increasingly disparate.78

Between 1977 and 1981, the WVBF and the WVDF offered distinct festivals. Their targeted participants overlapped but were not identical. As in the past, the WVBF focused on ballet, whereas the newer WVDF included ballet in its roster of dance styles and embraced a wider range of concert dance techniques as well. These differences were demonstrated in the poster advertising the 1977 Cultural Center event. The announcement showed an illustration of a

78 “Questionnaire Summary.”
young dancer in a short, modern-looking ballet tutu with her hair loose and her head thrown back. She wore pointe shoes, the universal mark of a ballerina. Yet her leg was turned in as if she were a modern or a jazz dancer. Combining ballet and modern dance, the old and the new, this poster disregarded stylistic boundaries and attempted to speak to performance dancers across an assortment of styles.  

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80 “Dance Festival October 4-9, 1977,” poster.
Chapter Three

“When We Dance”: Stylistic Diversification at the West Virginia Dance Festival, 1982-1990

“As the world fast-forwards to the edge of the next millennium, dance too poises on numerous brinks. The mid-seventies, the eighties, and the early nineties have seen an unprecedented variety and abundance of dance activity, the so-called ‘dance boom.’ . . . Old boundaries—some of them cracked open slightly in the sixties—are being broken wide.”

“During the latter part of the [twentieth] century, dancers, as a matter of course, absorbed aspects of both classicism and modernism in their formative years.”

In 1982 and 1983 the West Virginia Division of Culture and History (DCH) re-conceptualized and re-formatted the West Virginia Dance Festival (WVDF). The DCH sent letters to attending groups explaining that the event was now focused on offering students the opportunity to perform, watch their peers perform, and take classes from nationally recognized guest teachers. Festivals would highlight a “focus on dance as an art form rather than a recreational activity.” This focus indicated a fundamental shift from the early WVDF observational concentration to a more comprehensive focus on education and artistry. At this time, the WVDF also altered the previous West Virginia Ballet Festival (WVBF) hegemonic balletic concentration to encompass all styles of performance dance that were practiced in West Virginia. The WVDF had included a variety of performance dance styles since its conception in 1977, but until its 1982-1983 structure change, most attendees merely observed non-balletic styles. Few WVDF attendees participated in non-balletic classes until this period.

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83 “1982 West Virginia Dance Festival Presented by the Division of Culture and History,” The Cultural Center: April 16-18, 1982; Nancy Hindsley Events Coordinator to Dance Instructors March 10, 1980, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, March 10, 1980; Dr. Norman Fagan Commissioner of Culture and History to Dancers April 16, 1982, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival
The WVDF move away from an exclusively balletic focus to an inclusion of numerous concert dance styles expressly corresponded to broader dance trends in the United States dance boom. In the mid-to-late-twentieth century, the divide between ballet and modern dance became increasingly blurred. Ballet companies remained focused on presenting balletic works, but they also included more modern and jazz-influenced works in their repertoire. Dancers who had been able to rely solely on their balletic skills now had to expand their abilities to encompass other styles as well. Dancers gained marketability by cross-training in assorted concert dance techniques. This practice increased dancers’ adaptability but frequently weakened the technical groundwork dancers needed to become strong, style-specific artists.84

The transition from a ballet-dominated festival to an inclusive performance dance event meant that the makeup of the WVDF community changed, and the individual outlooks of the original WVBF community were also affected. WVDF dance teacher Ella Hay noted that non-balletic artists struggled to find acceptance at the early festivals: “People who were modern really had a hard time getting their toe in the door because the [others] just did not want them.” Hay associated artists’ identities with the style of dance they practiced. She did not refer to “someone who danced modern” but instead discussed “people who were modern.” Ballet was a style of dance embraced by WVBF, but it was also a coded set of beliefs, a cultural language the WVBF teachers used to identify themselves and understand performance dance and the professional dance world. Beginning in 1982-1983, WVBF attendees had to learn to co-exist with artists whose work and artistic opinions were often very different from their own.85

Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, April 16, 1980.
85 Deborah Novak, interview with Lauren Angel, Huntington, West Virginia, July 29, 2011; Ella Hay, interview by Lauren Angel, Huntington, West Virginia, June 16, 2011.
Ballet, Modern, and Jazz Dance at the West Virginia Dance Festival

From 1983-1996, modern and jazz dance classes were consistently present at the WVDF. Other types of classes, such as tap dance, were also intermittently present. Yet ballet remained the most influential style of concert dance at the WVDF during this period. For many members of the performance dance community produced by the WVDF, balletic ability was a vital and indispensable skill. For these artists, ballet was the default technique of the WVDF and other styles of dance were supplementary. Consequently, modern and jazz were valuable additions to the festivals, but they remained largely secondary to ballet during this period. Yet, although the WVDF community remained ballecently centered, modern and jazz became progressively more prominent. Ballet was never replaced by these styles, but a balletic influence became less centralized as modern and jazz teachers questioned the dominant position of ballet at the WVDF. The work of Jerry Rose and some other WVDF artists remained balletic but also embraced a more contemporary style at this time. Other artists, such as Hay and WVBF/WVDF teacher Velma Schrader, remained unshakably devoted to an exclusively balletic style.86

The increased stylistic plurality of the WVDF enhanced the festivals’ alignment with the nationalized concert dance community. The community’s concentration on training dancers who were artistically versatile drew focus away from the characteristics that distinguished different concert dance styles. Cross-disciplinary choreography was increasingly common, and many artists considered contemporary choreography to be accessible to non-artistic audience members in a way that classical ballet was not. Professional dancers were not often celebrated for being

outstanding classical performers at this time. Rather, professional choreographers and ballet masters now expected dancers to be well-rounded technicians. This concentration on technical adaptability and audience accessibility blurred the some of the divisions between artists’ dissimilar ability levels. European old-world classical ballet companies used a strict system of hierarchal rankings that separated leading dancers from the less-capable or less-experienced members of the corps de ballet. In the midcentury, many non-balletic groups used rankings that were more informal and were also more fluid. Some troupes disregarded such separations altogether, and by the 1980s many balletic companies in the United States had modified these traditional rankings. This lack of distinction presented company members as part of a cohesive unit but sometimes failed to celebrate individual talent, training, or experience. Dancers trained to become capable of adapting to any style of movement, but many were not able to retain the artistic and technical distinction that results from intense focus on a single technique.87

The WVDF was affected by the professional trend toward unclear rankings and technical variety during this period. The event ranked its groups with a designation as a “school” or a higher “company” title. “Schools” supposedly trained students to become members of “companies,” yet this system was not always accurate or enforced at the WVDF. The WVDF also ranked individual dancers according to their class level placement but encoded these placements in titles that used colors instead of numbers. Therefore, a student who took a “purple” level class did not necessarily know if the WVDF considered them to be a beginning, intermediate, or advanced dancer. The WVDF stylistic plurality during this period meant that modern, jazz, and ballet dancers attended the same festival and took the same classes. Although

most had at least some experience with all three styles, it was difficult for adjudicators to compare a student who might have been an advanced modern dancer but a beginning ballet dancer with a student who was advanced in both techniques. Teachers debated how to best address this issue, and the WVDF revised its adjudication guidelines to specifically address the requirements for each level. Despite these efforts, the issue of student rankings continued to be debated, and the WVDF community repeatedly attempted to define student artistic ability as they adjusted to the stylistic plurality of the event.88

In 1990, the DCH printed a WVDF questionnaire that solicited anonymous answers from WVDF teachers concerning their visions of future festival events. Many of the responding teachers mentioned how much they appreciated the important opportunities that the WVDF provided for West Virginia teachers to discuss their artistic concerns with in-state peers and out-of-state professional artists. Teachers worried that the DCH might cancel or drastically alter the event due to state budget concerns. They were apprehensive that this could impede their ability to form important links to a regional and national concert dance community. WVDF teachers consistently described their hope that the festival would help them preserve and enhance the connections they had formed. These nameless responses, however, also emphasized the divisions that existed within the festival community. Teachers were concerned with the stylistic changes at the WVDF. Some felt that modern and jazz were treated as secondary styles and

wanted to increase the expanded focus of the WVDF. Others worried that students needed more exposure to high quality balletic guest artists and disliked the diverse approach of the event. The struggle to find a balance between ballet and other styles of dance influenced the WVDF community throughout this period and resulted in a community that was stylistically diverse. Community members remained, however, fully and consistently committed to producing well-trained artists.89

The Changing Community of the West Virginia Dance Festival

Comments on the WVDF teacher-questionnaire confirmed that, although an artistic community was an essential aspect of the festivals, the community was divided over stylistic values. When asked “what are your specific areas of concern with the Dance Festival?” a teacher replied “that it takes place. That there be equal emphasis placed on Modern and Jazz as there has been on classical ballet.” This responder capitalized “Modern and Jazz” but used lower case letters when writing “classical ballet.” She challenged the balletic hegemony characterizing the WVDF and overtly asked the festival to modify its balletic foundation. Another teacher similarly wrote:

My main concern is that if the Dance Festival continues to be extremely classical ballet dominated, I will lose interest in attending. I realize my interest in New Dance . . . Contact Improvisation, Improvisation, Avant-Garde, release work, is in a minority . . . still I feel it is valid and important. I would like to have a teacher from this vein of dance come to the festival.

Though this writer openly doubted her group’s continued attendance if the balletically centered festivals did not change, other teachers felt that the event was too focused on non-balletic styles. Hay, for example, acknowledged that the national world of concert dance was changing at this time but thought such shifts were “a little sad.” She explained that, because each style had a

89 “Questionnaire Summary.”
distinct look, dancers who intensively cross-trained were unable to achieve the standard of excellence possessed by older generations of ballet dancers.\(^90\)

Teachers gave divergent answers to a survey question that solicited their recommendations for the 1991 WVDF Company in Residence. One teacher asserted “. . . we would best benefit from an ‘eclectic’ company at the festival . . . modern, ballet, jazz.” Her statement grouped “modern, ballet, and jazz” together underneath the category of an “eclectic” company, meaning a company who performed works in several different styles. Her advice pointed to two important features of the WVDF culture at this time. First, this teacher understood that professional dance companies commonly incorporated repertoires of stylistically varied works. Such recognition suggested that the WVDF regional teachers were familiar with the nationalized trends of the professional concert dance world. In keeping abreast of these trends, the WVDF teachers acted as regional members of a national concert dance community. Second, none of the question responses requested a company who performed exclusively modern or jazz works. The call for a company with a mixed repertoire thereby indicated a realization that, in 1990, ballet remained too essential at the WVDF to be entirely removed from the guest company repertoire.\(^91\)

The developing professionalization of the festival also divided members of the WVDF community. After the 1982 WVDF re-structure, the festival initiated a series of guidelines aimed at providing “a focus on dance as an art form rather than a recreational activity . . . an in-depth learning experience through classes, viewing performances, and consultations . . . [and] a performance situation whereby the best of each company is presented.” In 1983, Fagan and members of his staff sent WVDF groups a letter explaining the changes. All groups were to

\(^{90}\) “Questionnaire Summary”; Hay, 2011.
\(^{91}\) “Questionnaire Summary.”
present a performance piece for adjudication, and the letter detailed the requirements groups had to meet in order to qualify for a “school” or a “company” designation:

**Performance #1 Dance School Groups.** These schools represent full-time dance schools in West Virginia. All groups wishing to perform must be adjudicated.  
**Performance # 2 West Virginia Performing Companies.** These are companies with a repertoire, a full-time artistic director, and having a regular season with at least two paid performances annually. The performances cannot be related to an annual recital.  
**Performance # 3 Artist-in-Residence.** Lecture demonstration and performance.92

Group titles supposedly designated the dancers’ ability levels. “Schools” and “companies” were adjudicated on different days and performed on different nights. Such delineations, however, did not necessarily designate dissimilar capabilities. Guidelines were not strictly enforced, and many teacher-choreographers simply chose which title to mark.93

Adjudications established student level placements, and categorized them according to their balletic abilities. Beginning students were not allowed to take part in classes at this time, and an “Honors Class” was chosen at the event itself. Modern and jazz classes were also offered, but they were not recognized as being as prestigious as ballet. Adjudicators did not therefore use these techniques to determine students’ level placements. Consequently, a student who was very advanced in jazz but not at all advanced in ballet would have taken all of their classes at a lower level. In 1983, the WVDF would not have categorized this student as advanced dancer in any style because the festival would not have officially recognized their non-balletic expertise.94

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92 Fagan to Dance Schools, 1983.  
93 Dr. Norman Fagan Commissioner of Culture and History to Dance Schools February 22, 1985, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, February 22, 1985; “1982 West Virginia Dance Festival Presented by the Division of Culture and History”; Fagan to Dance Schools, 1983; Schrader, 2011.  
94 Fagan to Dance Schools, 1983.
As stylistic issues arose and guest artists made suggestions to enhance the event, Fagan and his staff continued to modify the explicit 1982 guidelines for adjudications and festival participation. In 1985, Fagan’s letter to WVDF groups read:

We have been encouraged by the growth in the festival over the past three years. We feel that the dance community has started to establish itself as a unit capable of sharing with one another and exchanging energy and enthusiasm. The faculty and adjudicators have applauded your willingness to take constructive criticism and open yourself up to the challenge of growth.

One observation from all concerned; the Dance Festival has not reached its full potential! Last year the adjudicators and faculty made strong recommendations for the future of the Festival, with quality as the main consideration.

Fagan celebrated the dance community formed through the WVDF and the passion of the festival attendees, but he also stressed that the “quality” of WVDF groups needed to be increased. The letter gave a series of new instructions for performing groups, asking them to bring only well-rehearsed choreographic works to the adjudication. Additionally, a rule that all attending students had to be at least twelve years old emphasized the WVDF requirement that no beginning students attend the event.95

In 1982, the WVDF did not charge any fees to attend the festival, but groups with a “company” title received financial compensation for their travel expenses, whereas “schools” did not. This distinction was the source of some of the controversy in the WVDF community. In July 1989, Fagan retired and was replaced as DCH Commissioner by William Drennen.

Drennen and his staff addressed the sensitive topic of the WVDF financial policy. When the 1990 WVDF questionnaire asked “what do you think would be a fair amount to charge to attend the Dance Festival?” several teachers gave in-depth responses. One answer to this question appeared to have been from a company director. She mentioned her troupe’s financial struggles and explained “. . . the festival is a time when we feel appreciated as dancers and that our work

95 Fagan to Dance Schools, 1985.
has merit. This feeling is brought up by the fact that the festival has been free. We perform for very little money during the year and it is affirming not to have to pay to attend the festival and perform. . . .” This director valued her group’s status as a “company” and felt that the dedication and abilities of her dancers merited free WVDF attendance. Yet a second responder suggested reversing the financial structure that favored companies over schools. She recommended schools or “novice companies” pay fifty dollars to attend and “professional companies” pay one hundred dollars “if these companies have been adjudicated and will be performing.” This teacher also thought that companies should finance their own festival-related expenses. Another teacher wrote that fees should be set according to the number of classes available to each WVDF student. She valued educational participation at the WVDF above performances, and felt that fees should be determined accordingly. Indeed, despite various divisions, most responders valued education above other issues at the WVDF.96

The WVDF efforts to modify festival regulation accentuated many of the divisions in the WVDF community, but members consistently valued education and participation at the event. For example, when the WVDF questionnaire asked teachers “how do you feel about dropping the school performance in order to allow time for a company performance and/or special classes?” most of the responders were concerned with the educational implications of the suggestion. Some teachers were extremely opposed to the idea because they felt that school performances were a crucial part of students’ WVDF experience. Others felt that the school

96 Dr. Norman Fagan, interview by Lauren Angel, Barboursville, West Virginia, August 18, 2010; Fagan to Dance Schools, 1983; William Drennen Commissioner of Culture and History to Dancers April 11-13, 1991, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, April 11-13, 1991; “Questionnaire Summary”; in the generalized world of concert dance, a group’s professional status was usually determined by its’ ability to consistently pay a fixed group of performers.
performances should be eliminated in favor of exposing students to more professional-quality work and/or participatory classes.\textsuperscript{97}

From 1982-1990, teachers were divided over the WVDF stylistic choices and the preference they gave to “companies” over “schools.” The community was united, however, through its shared dedication to the art of concert dance. WVDF attendees attached great importance to their membership in this regional community that connected them to the national concert dance community. The WVDF appreciated these values. It treated concert dance as an art form and adhered to the national concert dance trends that embraced stylistic diversity. The adjudication process and administrative efforts to professionalize the WVDF helped teachers improve their skills and gave them an opportunity to expose their students to professional-quality classes and performances. As a result of these initiatives, many of the guests artists who worked at the WVDF from 1982-1990 were also invested in aligning the WVDF with national standards and trends in concert dance.

**Guest Teachers at the West Virginia Dance Festival**

Fagan’s focus on developing West Virginia concert dance through the WVDF helped align West Virginia with national dance trends that embraced stylistic fluidity. If ballet students wanted to participate in the national world of concert dance, then they had to learn at least the basic aspects of modern and jazz technique. The WVDF continued the WVBF use of nationally prominent guest teachers but expanded the earlier balletic focus to include guest artists in different types of performance dance. The earlier balletic WVBF guest teachers introduced students to professional concert dance. The varied WVDF guest teachers encouraged students diversify their training in order to align themselves with national trends.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{97} “Questionnaire Summary.”

Although the WVDF served a community of dancers who trained in different styles of concert dance, the primary style of the adjudicating faculty was ballet. It was not until 1996 that a jazz teacher served with the balletic WVDF adjudicators and judged students on their jazz as well as their ballet technique. Nevertheless, in 1987 the WVDF scheduled only modern and jazz classes for “purple” and “orange” level students. This indicated an administrative understanding of ballet as a peripheral technique for some groups. Conversely, there were no students at the 1987 WVDF who participated solely in ballet classes. University of Cincinnati faculty member Sue Simpson and North Carolina School of the Arts (NCSA) Assistant Dean of Dance Duncan Noble were the 1987 adjudicators. Both were balletic artists who were also educators. They worked in pre-professional programs that prepared students to enter the competitive professional world of dance. Simpson and Noble centralized ballet but also recognized that modern and jazz were an undeniably significant aspect of concert dance at this time. These teachers affected the structure of the WVDF and its community through their work as teachers and adjudicators.99

Born in 1922, Noble was a premiere performer and later a nationally renowned teacher. As a performer, Noble was one of the first early twentieth-century artists who was highly capable in both ballet and modern dance. He performed as a member of the prestigious Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and the Ballet Theatre (later American Ballet Theatre), but he also worked with choreographer Valerie Bettis’ modern dance group. These experiences gave him personal knowledge of the increased stylistic fluidity present in the professional world. In his New York Times obituary, author Jack Anderson wrote: “He insisted that his students know more about

ballet than technique and constantly spoke to them about dance history and traditions. Yet his tastes remained eclectic and in 1982 he directed students from the North Carolina school in ‘Jazz Is,’ a touring production that traced the history of jazz.” As a teacher, Noble helped students become working performers who were also artists. He expected them to be intimately aware of the history of their art, but he trained them to work in the present artistic atmosphere. At the WVDF, Noble adjudicated and taught students in ballet. Yet he recognized the importance of non-balletic techniques and encouraged students to train in these styles as well.\(^{100}\)

Like Noble, Simpson was trained in ballet but was also experienced in other styles of concert dance. She was an accomplished teacher who instructed children beginning their dance training as well as young adults preparing to enter the professional world. Simpson eventually left the University of Cincinnati to found the Parapluie Dance Company in Mobile, Alabama. “Parapluie” means “umbrella,” and this was a fitting description of Simpson’s troupe. The Company Mission was to provide experience, entertainment, and education. It offered advanced students from several area studios an opportunity to perform. Parapluie choreography was strongly based in ballet technique but also incorporated a contemporary edge.\(^{101}\)

Simpson and Noble were aware of the changes brought to professional concert dance through the midcentury dance boom. They were historical products of this period and their teaching reflected their contemporaneous understandings. In the 1980s, students who hoped to be widely marketable artists needed to possess a strong balletic technique, but they also needed the adaptability offered by technical cross-training. Simpson, and especially Noble, helped WVDF students become aware of trends in professional concert dance. They imparted this


knowledge through their formal interactions with students in adjudications and classes. They also spoke to Fagan and his staff informally and made suggestions that helped align the WVDF with the national world of concert dance. Additionally, Noble regularly worked with WVDF students outside the festivals as a guest teacher in their individual schools.\textsuperscript{102}

Noble was the longest-serving guest artist at the festival, and he helped to shape the direction of the event for many years. Rose recalled that he became invested in West Virginia performance dance and “became a part of what we’re doing.” Noble first came to the festival as a guest artist for the 1973 WVBF and consistently returned to the WVBF and the WVDF. Through his work in West Virginia schools, Noble developed a relationship with West Virginia performance dance that went beyond the borders of the festivals. The troupes who worked with Noble outside the WVDF were tied together through his pedagogic influence and their appreciation of his continual efforts on behalf of West Virginia concert dance. In 1991, several of these groups collaborated in a performance titled “Tribute to Duncan Noble.” The concert was jointly presented by the Cultural Center, the WVDF, and DanceWV (the fall Mini-Fest administering teachers’ organization). Students from Beckley Dance Theatre, the Huntington Dance Theatre, the Schrader Youth Ballet, and the Art Center School of Dance appeared in the cast.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{102} Fagan to Dance Schools, 1985; Dr. Norman Fagan Commissioner of Culture and History to Dancers 1987, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, 1987.

Noble’s substantial work in the WVDF concert dance community was largely focused on balleterically-based troupes. These groups were able to gain prestige in West Virginia concert dance through their degree of access to Noble, his teaching, and his choreography. Schrader’s students performed works choreographed by Noble in several WVDF concerts. As a WVDF adjudicator, Noble regularly examined Schrader’s students and often critiqued their performance in works he had created and staged specifically for them. Unlike students who had not worked with Noble outside the WVDF, Schrader Youth Ballet students had the advantage of dancing for an adjudicator they knew relatively well.\textsuperscript{104}

Noble’s adjudication notes indicated his familiarity with particular groups. He referred to leading students by name and offered corrections for specific dancers. For example, in his 1984 comments for the Schrader Youth Ballet, he remarked: “A well-danced and well-rehearsed piece. Think more about facial expressions and relating to the audience. Mandy—more facial expression on entrance and solo . . . Shelby—when [you] run back to pose during [your] solo, more emphasized arm position and head movements. . . .” Yet for Little Ballet Theatre, a group Noble worked with only through the WVDF, he wrote: “In the diagonal line, make sure the 5\textsuperscript{th} positions are closed—especially the girl in the front.” The Schrader Youth Ballet students enjoyed a special, publicized connection with Noble and were familiar with Noble’s particular balletic and pedagogic approach. Through this connection to Noble, Schrader’s students gained an advantage over many of their WVDF peers.\textsuperscript{105}


\textsuperscript{105} “Dance Festival Adjudication Sheet,” Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, 1983; Dance Festival Adjudications Sheet 1984, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, 1984.
Between his first appearance as a guest artist in the 1973 WVBF and his death in 2002, Noble influenced the vast majority of West Virginia concert dance students. As a teacher working within the national world of concert dance, he was able to help West Virginia students increase their awareness of the standards and attributes of concert dance in the United States. Students gained an appreciation of the artistry inherent in performance dance through their contact with Noble and other WVDF guest teachers. They also gained an understanding of the diverse stylistic abilities they needed to possess in order to perform as professional artists. Noble occasionally gave NCSA scholarships to particularly promising students. Many students who attended NCSA summer and/or academic year programs retained their personal associations with West Virginia concert dance as they progressed through the pre-professional and professional world. Their contact with the WVDF and its guest teachers gave students an understanding of the national concert dance community and how they could further their participation in this community.106

Students at the West Virginia Dance Festival

From 1982-1990 the professionalized approach of the WVDF helped some West Virginia students become professional dancers or dancers of professional quality. Two notable students who achieved a very high standard in concert dance were Kim Pauley and Nick Mishoe. Pauley trained with the American Academy of Ballet in Charleston, West Virginia and at pre-professional schools outside the state. She also performed with the American Academy of Ballet associate company, the Charleston Ballet. Mishoe was born in Huntington, West Virginia and trained under Hay at the Art Center School of Dance. He attended the WVDF as a young dancer.


106 “Sixth Annual Ballet Festival”; “The Division of Culture and History Presents the West Virginia Dance Festival, 2003”; Nick Mishoe, email to Lauren Angel, August 12, 2011.
and worked professionally with the Boston Ballet and the Dutch National Ballet. Pauley and Mishoe’s careers followed different paths; Pauley lived and danced in West Virginia throughout the majority of her artistic career, whereas Mishoe was a member of an international company. Both, however, were members of a national and a regional concert dance community. Furthermore, Pauley and Mishoe were both balletically trained artists who also performed stylistically diverse works.\(^\text{107}\)

In 1989, the WVDF honored Pauley’s mentor, the late Andre Van Dame. He was born in Brussels and danced with the Brussels Royal Opera ballet troupe. The 1989 WVDF program explained that Van Dame founded the American Academy of ballet and the Charleston Ballet in 1956. The program celebrated the group and noted: “The Charleston ballet was established as among the first of the regional ballet companies in the United States. . . . The company was designated the Centennial Ballet in 1963 and later accorded the title of the official West Virginia State Ballet Company.” The Charleston Ballet did not operate as a full-time professional company, but it did offer pre-professional training. Although the troupe did not participate in the early WVBF, it regularly attended the WVDF. Fagan recalled that Van Dame was an excellent teacher who was also “very elite.”\(^\text{108}\)


Pauley was the principal dancer of the Charleston Ballet and Van Dame’s leading student. She appeared as the WVDF guest performer in 1989. Unusually for a ballerina, she performed only solo dances and was not accompanied by a male partner in this performance. Her solos were choreographed by the late Van Dame, who created both classical and contemporary ballets. Pauley’s photograph in the WVDF program showed a balletically modern performer who worked en pointe but wore a lyrically elegant dress suitable for contemporary work:

Similarly to Pauley, Mishoe primarily trained in ballet but was also a versatile performer. He recalled that his older sister talked about attending the WVDF, and when he was old enough he began participating in the festival as well. Mishoe remembered that he gained important assistance from the WVDF guest teachers. He felt that “new input from different teachers was vital to my growth as a student.” These instructors corrected Mishoe on many of the same points that Hay, his regular teacher, discussed with him. Yet the WVDF guest teachers’ fresh


109 “1989 West Virginia Dance Festival.”
explanations helped Mishoe gain a deeper understanding of how and why he needed to adjust his approach. Mishoe explained that, after the festivals, “Mrs. Hay would intentionally repeat something one of the teachers had said to me that she knew I would respond to. It proved to be a strong learning cycle for me.” Mishoe appreciated the relationships he developed with his West Virginia peers at the WVDF. He valued the chance that the festivals offered to learn with other students in the state and perform for a supportive, informed WVDF audience.\textsuperscript{110}

Noble taught Mishoe at the WVDF and as a guest teacher outside the event. He guided Mishoe’s work and, when he was old enough, gave him a scholarship to study at the NCSA. As a student at the NCSA, Mishoe performed classically balletic works like \textit{The Nutcracker} and newer, balletically based contemporary works. After completing the NCSA high school program, Mishoe was able to join the prestigious Boston Ballet. Part of this group’s mission was to develop “new works and approaches to the art of ballet while preserving ballet’s rich legacy.” Mishoe continued his work in classical and contemporary dance when he left the Boston Ballet to join the Dutch National Ballet. This group was dedicated to presenting a mixed repertoire of works that included new and exciting cutting-edge pieces as well as classical ballets. When Mishoe retired from performing, he became a teacher in the New Jersey Academy of Dance Arts.\textsuperscript{111}

Although Mishoe left the state to perform, Pauley stayed in West Virginia as a performer and later as a teacher. Nevertheless, both retained their sense of community membership in West Virginia concert dance. As the owner and operator of the American Academy of Ballet in Charleston, Pauley brought her students each year to the WVDF. As an out-of-state professional artist, Mishoe regularly returned to the Art Center School of Dance as a guest teacher. He

\textsuperscript{110} Mishoe, 2011.
explained that “the sense of community I felt the Festival created among dancers in West Virginia was strong. I think most of us knew we were part of something special and that bonded us and also inspired us to dance our best for each other.” Mishoe felt the WVDF helped him achieve membership within a vital community. This membership became part of Pauley and Mishoe’s identities. It encouraged them to stay involved in West Virginia concert dance long after their WVDF student experience.\textsuperscript{112}

Conclusion

From 1983-1996, the WVDF included ballet, modern, jazz, and occasionally other styles of dance in its events. It remained a ballethically centered festival from 1983-1990, but the WVDF served a progressively varied concert dance community. The increased stylistic diversity of the WVDF was partly due to growing attendance by non-balletic groups. Guest teachers who worked within the national concert dance world also encouraged balletic students to train in multiple styles so as to be marketable within the professional world. Students at the WVDF during this period were influenced by national trends through their contact with WVDF guest teachers at the festival and outside of festival events. Serious balletic students, like Pauley and Mishoe, found success by training to become classical but adaptable performers.\textsuperscript{113}

The WVDF community was a regional component of the national dance community at this time. Although it was not a nationally prominent professional group, it was molded by national trends in concert dance. Accordingly, the WVBF/WVDF was a product of the

\textsuperscript{112} Hay, 2011; Mishoe, 2011.

midcentury performance dance boom as well as an active participant of the boom. The WVDF received National Endowment for the Arts funds that were made possible through the boom influence, and it became more inclusive of non-balletic techniques in accordance with the same trends in the national world of concert dance. During this period, national performance dance operated with a gendered structure that evolved throughout the history of performance dance. Women and men served different roles as performers and often served different roles as non-performing artists as well. The WVBF/WVDF reflected and modified the gendered structure of professional dance. Gender at the WVBF/WVDF was connected to gender in professional dance but was distinct to the events’ regional characteristics as well.114

Chapter Four

“Dancing Queen:” Women and Men at the West Virginia Ballet Festival/ West Virginia Dance Festival

“[Dancer] Rex Tilton has it all. He’s tall, he’s handsome, he has a good strong technique, and he can partner well. In the ballet world, men who have all of those attributes are a commodity.”

“We feel we know [Romantic Era ballerina] Marie Taglioni. . . . She is birdlike, quaint, and almost cloyingly sweet, and if there is a thought in her head, it is lost in the mists of her vaporous ethereality. She is the pink-tights-and-toe-shoes ballerina of girlish dreams—and feminist nightmares.”

Ballet has historically entailed distinct roles for women and men. On the stage, a classical *pas de deux* (a dance in which the man acts as a buttress for the woman) emphasized women’s reliance on men. Partnered dance usually indicated doomed or joyously triumphant love and illustrated ballerinas’ emotional and physical need to be supported by their male partner. Off the stage, girls and boys trained in the same basic technical skills but acquired very different capabilities. A female dancer worked in *pointe* shoes, specialized shoes that allowed her to dance on the tips of her toes and create an image of an airy creature with very little contact with the earth. A male dancer supported his ballerina on the ground and carried her in the air. He had to learn strength and steadiness so his female partner could trust him to securely lift and lower her body.

Ballet artists’ genders were a central aspect of their artistic and personal identities, but both female and male dancers were marketable products as well as individual artists. They were the tools that allowed a company to function and a choreographer to work. A choreographer needed  

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access to a selection of highly capable dancers in order to execute his vision through their physical abilities. Contrasting numbers of female and male artists have long been an ingrained aspect of balletic culture, with many more women dancers participating in ballet compared to men. The West Virginia Ballet Festival (WVBF)/West Virginia Dance Festival (WVDF) community was a regional example of the gendered participation numbers in ballet. Many more local female artists than male artists attended the festival events.¹¹⁸

WVBF student Elizabeth Hay-Martin recalled that disparate numbers of female and male dancers were present at the WVBF and in her home school, and she believed that the cause of this imbalance was based in stereotypes concerning male ballet dancers. She explained that there was an “assumption that all male dancers [were] gay and if you’re going to take ballet, then that means you’re gay.” When the first WVBF occurred in 1968, the New York City Stonewall riots were a year away and homosexuality was considered a mental illness. Given the culture of non-acceptance surrounding sexual differences at this time, “gay” was unlikely to be a socially desirable label. Additionally, the lack of professional concert dance in West Virginia meant that young boys did not have artistic adult role models. Unless they lived in the Beckley area and worked under Jerry Rose, their only opportunity to learn ballet was with a female teacher and surrounded by female students. This situation enforced a regional image of ballet as an art that was not performed by men and was therefore feminine. Hay-Martin suggested that the presence

of male guest teachers at the WVBF helped gradually erode the negative regional stereotypes surrounding men in ballet.\textsuperscript{119}

Nick Mishoe, one of the relatively few male WVDF students, agreed with Hay-Martin’s perception that male guest teachers at the festivals encouraged regional male participation. He explained that when he was a young student he knew that ballet “was socially viewed as wimpy and girly.” Because he was homeschooled, Mishoe did not face significant teasing, but he believed that he would have felt more pressure to stop dancing if he had attended public school. Larger numbers of female than male dancers contributed to an image of ballet as a feminine art, and Mishoe encountered this perception as a WVDF student. Mishoe’s exceptionality as a male ballet dancer was highly visible in his ballet classes in which his classmates were all girls. When Mishoe encountered male guest artists at the WVDF, he felt “validated” as a male artist. He described the dancing of one particularly memorable guest performer as “strong.” When he saw this artist perform, Mishoe was immediately “sold on the power of male dancing.” He discovered that ballet was not necessarily soft and delicate, and this discovery encouraged him to continue dancing. Through the WVDF, Mishoe learned that male ballet dancers could convey strength, power, and masculinity.\textsuperscript{120}

Although Mishoe learned to associate ballet with masculine attributes, he remained one of comparatively few male dancers in the balletic community. Even the language that has surrounded ballet has indicated that women are more prevalent than men. For example, women are often referred to as “ballet dancers” or “ballerinas,” but men are usually called “male ballet dancers.” The use of the word “male” in this title indicates that the term “ballet dancer” is feminine; women are the assumed dancers and men are the exceptions. Divergent numbers of

\textsuperscript{119} Dr. Elizabeth Hay-Martin, interview by Lauren Angel, Huntington West Virginia, July 21, 2011.
\textsuperscript{120} Nick Mishoe, email to Lauren Angel, August 12, 2011.
female and male dancers have led to a greater demand for men in ballet than women, and this setup has led to numerous disparities. Because the number of male dancers has been significantly smaller than the number of female dancers, male artists have more easily accessed pre-professional and professional opportunities. Additionally, male dancers are often able to begin their training much later than their female counterparts. Hay-Martin attended the North Carolina School of the Arts (NCSA) pre-professional summer program when she was fifteen. She was unable to secure a place in the more competitive NCSA academic program because, she was told, she was “too old.” Peter Frame, Hay-Martin’s WVBF peer, also attended the NCSA summer session. He had begun his training only three months prior to his NCSA summer scholarship, but he was able to enroll in the NCSA academic program and became a professional dancer after his NCSA graduation. Unbalanced numbers of women and men, and a distinctly gendered art, upheld a balletic culture that offered very different pre-professional and professional opportunities for female and male artists.121

Although female and male dancers were both choreographic instruments, men in ballet have historically held a disparate number of non-dancing artistic leadership positions in major companies. Women have also worked as artistic leaders, but very few women have been as publically prominent in these roles as their male counterparts. Some women have operated in less-public roles, coaching ballerinas as they prepared for a demanding role or running rehearsals for a company corps de ballet. Other women have worked in more-visible positions, choreographing new works or setting the artistic direction of a company. Yet most of the highly renowned balletic professional companies have been noticeably served by male choreographers

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121 The title “danseur” can also be used to refer to male ballet dancers, but this term is much less popular than “male ballet dancer”; Hay-Martin, 2011; “Local Dancer Signs with New York Ballet Co.,” Raleigh Register, April 25, 1975; Rhone.
and male artistic directors. In contrast, women have headed the majority of less-renowned regional troupes.  

At the WVBF, Jerry Rose led the event as the board Chairman and de facto artistic director. At the WVDF, Norman Fagan was the head administrator who set the direction of the event. The vast majority of the regional teachers attending the events were female, as were most of their students. These teachers never served as public heads of the festival, yet they contributed to festival events in a variety of ways. They administered and taught their individual schools, traveled to festivals, and choreographed works they presented at the WVBF/WVDF. With women working as leaders in their home districts and men working as leaders of the combined West Virginia balletic community, the WVBF/WVDF exhibited similar gender patterns as professional ballet.  

Historians who have examined ballet have often considered the stories of non-prominent and non-professional balletic companies to be less historically significant than the stories of famous


professional groups. This type of top-down historical approach has also highlighted the men who were at the forefront of these renowned companies. In order to draw a picture of the history of ballet that is more complete, regional and non-professional balletic troupes must be considered as well. These groups were frequently run by women, and studying such troupes challenges our understandings of gender in ballet. At the WVBF/WVDF, women were successful in their regional artistic community, whereas their male peers thrived in both their regional and their national communities. Rose, Fagan, and the female teachers worked to advance ballet within West Virginia concert dance, but, through their directorships, Rose and Fagan’s achievements were also visible to a national artistic community. The WVBF/WVDF shows how a regional concert dance community reflected some gendered aspects of the national concert dance community while simultaneously modifying other aspects.124

Gender Roles in the West Virginia Ballet Festival/West Virginia Dance Festival Community

Many more female teachers than male teachers attended the first WVBF in 1968. Indeed, Rose may have been the only male teacher working in West Virginia at this time. He successfully worked outside the state with his wife Sherry but had moved home to open the Beckley Dance Theatre school. Rose was an exceptionally effective leader, and his image as a balletic leader was reinforced by his identity as a male ballet teacher who had danced professionally outside the region. He confidently recalled that, in the world of West Virginia concert dance, “I was the man” and explained that this role helped him recruit teachers to attend

the WVBF. Rose’s connections with other male leaders in the state also helped his success in initiating the festival. Rose noted that his friend Ewel Cornett, the *Hatfields and McCoys* playwright, worked at the Cultural Center and helped him find ways to finance the WVBF.

Later, when Fagan became the Commissioner of Culture and History, Rose was able to rely on their friendship to help him finance the festival. As Fagan began constructing the WVDF, he turned to Rose for assistance in understanding West Virginia concert dance and creating an event for this community. Fagan also had a personal relationship with out-of-state teachers Duncan Noble, David Howard, and Ronnie De Marco. These three men became regular fixtures as WVDF guest teachers and adjudicators who helped Fagan shape the festivals.125

The interconnected circle of male administrators and artists at the festivals also extended to WVBF/WVDF male students. Noble, a guest teacher who was also a prominent faculty member at the NCSA, awarded summer-study scholarships to the ballet students he believed were capable of more intensive training. At the WVBF, he gave scholarships to Beckley brothers Peter and Paul Frame, among others. He later gave a scholarship to Huntington student Nick Mishoe at the WVDF. The Frame brothers and Mishoe all went on to dance with internationally respected professional ballet companies.126

A close group of female artists were also present within the WVBF/WVDF community, and many of these artists also committed themselves to achieving a high level of balletic ability. The careers of female WVBF/WVDF balletic artists, however, took place largely within their regional artistic community. This trend was part of a broader tendency by female concert dance

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artists to form regional communities in which they could practice their art. One notable West Virginia artist was Jean Dickinson, owner and operator of the Huntington-area Dickinson School of Dance. As a young mother, Ella Hay enrolled her daughters in the school. She sewed costumes to pay for their lessons and became progressively more interested in ballet. Dickinson encouraged her to learn more about the art, and Hay began taking class herself. Hay thus became a later-in-life devotee of ballet. Under Dickinson’s guidance, she was able to continue her education until she was qualified to teach herself. When Dickinson retired, Hay continued to teach and imparted Dickinson’s knowledge to her own students.127

Female guest teachers worked at the WVBF/WVDF alongside male guest teachers. These teachers taught and choreographed for professional schools and companies, but their troupes were frequently successful on a regional rather than a national level. For example, in 1983, WVDF adjudicator Sue Simpson taught ballet at the University of Cincinnati, a pre-professional college program. She had previously graduated from this program with both her undergraduate and graduate degrees. Consequently, her teaching position was a continuation of her work within the University of Cincinnati balletic community. Jill Eathorne-Bahr was also a 1983 WVDF guest teacher. She trained with a MidStates Regional Ballet Association Training Company and later organized her own regional company in South Carolina. In a time when prominent balletic choreographers were largely male, Bahr’s success as a female choreographer was admirable. Like many of her female peers, however, Bahr primarily worked in regional areas rather than major urban centers.128

This pattern of women’s regionalized balletic achievement additionally affected the WVBF/WVDF students. WVBF student Elizabeth Hay-Martin was from the Dickinson School of Dance and won a scholarship to study at the NCSA summer program. But, unlike several of her WVBF male peers, she was unable to gain a place at the NCSA intensive academic program. She recalled that the quality of her previous training was not the factor disqualifying her from the competitive academic session. Instead, the NCSA faculty did not feel that she was young enough or had the correct physical body for ballet. Hay-Martin continued to dance throughout high school and as an adult. She loved ballet, was a talented student, and persisted in her artistic training. Yet she was unable to compete on a national level, where the number of female dancers was always higher than the number of slots available to them. Similarly, Kim Pauley was a respected student and performer under Andre Van Dame in Charleston. In 1989, she became the teacher of Van Dame’s school and non-professional performing company and performed as the WVDF guest artist. Pauley was clearly a skilled artist, yet most of her accomplishments transpired within her West Virginia artistic community. She trained at non-West Virginian pre-professional programs but returned to perform and teach within the state. As her male peers performed in national and international settings, Pauley maintained a space for her art through her work in her Charleston school and West Virginia balletic community.129

As the WVBF gave way to the WVDF, the festival community began to include non-balletic teachers and dancers. This modification was linked to a national concert dance community, in which choreographers’ approaches frequently drew upon a combination of styles. When modern dance began in the twentieth century, it was a revolution against the rigidity of balletic technique. Many of the most famous modern dance choreographers were women who used their

choreography to question the gendered hierarchy of ballet. The tenets behind modern dance and the design of modern dance performances varied according to individual choreographers. Therefore, some modern works maintained a hierarchal gender structure but reversed it to place women ahead of men. Other works, especially several from the later part of the twentieth century, questioned gender differences and heteronormativity. The introduction of non-balletic styles of concert dance at the WVDF was also a challenge to the gendered arrangement of the festival community’s balletic culture. Nevertheless, even as the festival began to include other styles from 1977-1990, the focus of the WVDF remained centered on ballet.  

The gendered culture in ballet guided the geographic success of artists, and it shaped their identities as well. Gender differences are legitimized through the characteristics formed by individual and collective experiences. Societies use culturally normative definitions of women and men to define people’s encounters with their world (and their subsequent personality traits) as feminine or masculine. Gender is “performative”; that is, gender is established through repeated actions. There is no natural gender, so social (and artistic) performances create both gender and identity. Ballet dancer Danielle Davis explained that particular movements created dancers’ physical identities, noting “a lot of people say ballet is so unnatural for the body, but the thing is . . . it’s not so unnatural. It’s all about training your body . . .” Dancers sought to become one with their physicality and associated their bodies with their essential selves. Their identities became synonymous with the actions their bodies performed. Classical ballet was the fundamental style learned by most ballet dancers. It developed in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

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century and reflected the gender roles of the era. Therefore, the gendered traits of classically-trained dancers were products of a pre-twentieth century culture. Dancers did not disregard these features when they left the studio but instead trained their muscles to remember the gendered mannerisms of ballet. Strong male dancers lifted their female partners as high as possible, and delicate female dancers found artistic completion through their slim bodies. Striving to personify the powerful and handsome danseur noble or the delicately poised sylph, the WVBF/WVDF dancers carried their gendered roles in united physical and social identities on and off the stage.131

Teachers and Organizers at the West Virginia Ballet Festival/
West Virginia Dance Festival

The original administration of the WVBF was comprised of Jerry Rose, regional dance teachers who were overwhelmingly female, and teachers’ husbands or male associates. This group managed the event from 1968 until 1981. Women guided students from their individual schools in this festival community, while men usually served as WVBF administrators and board members. Hay explained that many female dance teachers were more comfortable concentrating on educational, rather than administrative, tasks. They asked their husbands, or another man who understood their school’s needs, to serve in their place on the official organizing board. Schrader likewise recalled her participation in preliminary organizational meetings but denied that she had any direct connection to the formal administration of the actual event. In contrast,

Rose was comfortable claiming his public role as a leader; he recalled his coordination of the WVBF and his ability to persuade teachers to attend.\footnote{Rose, 2010; Fagan, 2010; Schrader, 2011; Ella Hay, telephone conversation with author, January 4, 2012.}

Both women and men in the WVBF community influenced the festivals, but they did so in different ways and in different arenas. Attendees acted within a gender-differentiated artistic social structure. The work of the official WVBF board and informal discussions between teachers contributed to a variety of interconnected dialogues that formed and sustained the WVBF. Rose was a public figure who used verbal discourses to establish his view of the organization. As WVBF Chairman, Rose gave newspaper interviews in which he described the purpose of the events, his role, and the festival attendees. Beckley, Rose’s home, published most of the newspaper articles about the WVBF, but non-Beckley newspaper articles about the WVBF also relied on Rose for quotes and explanations. Non-festival West Virginia community members were introduced to the WVBF through these interviews and their perceptions of the event were consequently shaped by Rose’s voice. WVBF guest artists, whom Rose hired, also learned about the WVBF by speaking with Rose and hearing his analysis of the festival.\footnote{Rose, 2010; Hay, 2011; Hay, 2012; “Ballet Festival Here April 28,” \textit{Herald Dispatch}, April 14, 1968; “Ballet Festival is ‘Complete Success,’” \textit{Herald Dispatch}, April 29, 1968; “Ballet Festival comes to Huntington,” \textit{Herald Dispatch} March 26, 1972; “Ballet Festival Here April 28”; “Ballet Festival is ‘Complete Success’”; “Ballet Festival comes to Huntington”; Schrader, 2011.}

At least one female teacher-choreographer, Ella Flippin, served on the WVBF board in conjunction with Rose and her husband, Louise Flippin. Ella Flippin, however, did not speak for the organization in newspaper interviews. Most of the other female teachers conveyed their opinions by means of their male proxies who served on the board. Additionally, female teacher-choreographers used their educational and choreographic actions to contribute to the WVBF artistic discourse. Women showed their teaching styles through students who embodied their
teachers’ pedagogic abilities. Teacher-choreographers also created performances with the music, costumes, and movement they put together for WVBF concerts. Rose did this as well, but his contributions were augmented through his speech and actions as the WVBF Chairman.\(^\text{134}\)

Female teachers acted within the festival community, speaking with their WVBF participation, the training they gave their students, and the artistic products they staged at the WVBF concerts. Rose acted within the festival community, but he additionally acted as a bridge between the festival community and professional dance when he made decisions to bring particular guest teachers to the events. Furthermore, he acted as a bridge between the festival community and the non-artistic regional community when he spoke with newspaper reporters to explain the structure and format of the WVBF. For women at the WVBF therefore, actions spoke much louder than words.

From 1968-1981 the WVBF’s largely female composition aligned the event with regional balletic trends, wherein female, often non-professional, artists were much more common than male. Simultaneously, most of the eminent professional balletic choreographers in this period were male. Rose and a predominantly male board formally led the WVBF and hired professional guest artists for the event. The official male leadership at the festival connected the WVBF to the professional balletic world and was associated with the gender roles of the top echelons of professional ballet. Yet women’s participation as regional artists also linked the WVBF to a thriving, regionalized artistic world.\(^\text{135}\)

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\(^{135}\) Garafola, 225; Hanna, 228.
The gendered balletic culture of the WVBF was institutionalized in the Division of Culture and History (DCH)’s WVDF. Beginning in 1977, the WVDF used the DCH professional organization to manage the festivals. Fagan led this organization, and Rose gave Fagan informal advice and guidance. He continued to attend festivals as a teacher-choreographer, but he was also unofficially connected to the event administration through his relationship with Fagan. The removal of the WVBF board distanced the largely female West Virginia concert dance community from the festivals’ decision making process. Nevertheless, female teachers continued to informally communicate through their attendance and actions at festival events.¹³⁶

The WVDF was, in many ways, similar to the WVBF. Both provided events for West Virginia concert dancers and consequently served more female artists than male artists. Fagan expressly delineated between his DCH festivals and the WVBF. He credited Rose’s work at the WVBF as building the WVDF foundation. Yet Fagan saw the WVBF as an underdeveloped event. He explained that the DCH improved upon the format Rose initiated with a professional organization and superior funding. Fagan interpreted both events as reflections of their administrator’s abilities. Just as Rose implemented his vision for ballet through the WVBF, Fagan’s work at the WVDF carried out his plans to enrich West Virginia concert dance.¹³⁷

Fagan’s relationship to Rose and to a national artistic community influenced his conceptions of concert dance and the role of the WVDF. As the Director of Education at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC and the Director for Performing Arts and Public Media Programs at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Fagan connected with national arts administrators and professional choreographers who applied for NEA grants. This experience led him to be appointed to the board of the National Association of Regional Ballet (NARB) during his time as

the West Virginia Commissioner of Culture and History. Fagan reconnected with two male teachers, Ronnie De Marco and Duncan Noble, who became fixtures at the WVDF through his NARB work. De Marco was a jazz teacher who had also been a performer. He attended school with Fagan at Carnegie Mellon University. Noble met Fagan during his time at Carnegie Mellon University as well. Noble and Fagan worked together at the Pittsburgh Playhouse, a theater Fagan trained in while earning his degree. Howard was a noted ballet teacher from England. He met and became friends with Fagan through the NARB board. Fagan’s friendships with these three teachers established them as the longest-serving guest teachers at the WVDF. His personal connections with them also enhanced the extent of their influence. In addition to ballet, De Marco, Noble, and Howard encouraged Fagan to include other styles of dance in the festivals. Fagan remembered that “David, Duncan, Ronnie, and I would get together on the telephone and talk about [how to keep up with trends in concert dance], and bring new people in, and talk about how modern [dance] was coming in.” He explained that conversations with these three men helped him decide which professional guests to add or take off the WVDF roster.138

Fagan formed bonds with Rose, the former leader of the WVBF, and with the WVDF guest teachers through his work at the festival events. Female regional teachers were leaders in their individual district schools and also formed bonds with each other. They were teacher-choreographers who lived and worked across West Virginia. The gendered culture in ballet distinguished between women’s and men’s artistic and administrative roles. But a division also existed between prestigious professional companies and regional balletic communities that were often non-professional. Regional female teachers brought their students to festival events and exhibited their choreography in the festival concerts. These teachers were part of an informal

group of artists who connected to each other through their attendance at festivals and their shared regional and balletic identities.\textsuperscript{139}

Rose was linked to the regional teachers of the WVBF community, yet he was also a leader in the more nationalized aspects of this community. As the Chairman of the WVBF Board, he hired guest artists and was the public name and face of the WVBF. His relationship with arts administrator Ewel Cornett contributed to the financing of the WVBF, and his relationship with Fagan contributed to the development of the WVDF. Fagan’s friendship with the nationally prominent teachers Noble, De Marco, and Howard also shaped the WVDF and connected the West Virginia concert dance community to the national concert dance community.\textsuperscript{140}

**Guest Artists and Gender at the West Virginia Ballet Festival/West Virginia Dance Festival**

In 1968, Oleg Briansky and his wife Mireille were the first WVBF guest teachers. They both had excellent professional reputations, but their company, the “Briansky Ballet Company,” featured Oleg. Newspaper articles detailing the festival explained that “internationally-known ballet master, Oleg Briansky, will be in charge of a ballet festival . . . He will be assisted by Mrs. Briansky. . .” Articles used similar language to discuss the Roses:

Jerry Rose, director of the 1st annual West Virginia Festival of Ballet, and a chartered bus-load of students of the Beckley Dance Theatre left at 7 o'clock this morning for Huntington where the all-day festival is being held. Rose is being accompanied by his wife, Sherry, and a number of parents are following in cars.

Jerry and Sherry Rose both danced professionally and taught at the Beckley Dance Theatre. They were balletic teachers in the West Virginia dance community, but Jerry Rose enacted an additional role as the WVBFC Chairman that was more visible and publically prominent. The

\textsuperscript{139} Garafola, 225.  
\textsuperscript{140} Rose, 2010; Schrader, 2011; Fagan, 2010.
Briansky’s approach to the WVBF was similar to the Roses’ approach. Oleg operated as the person “in charge” of the 1968 WVBF, and Mireille operated as his “assistant.”

Newspaper pictures of the pair reiterated their separate roles. Oleg was dressed as a professional administrator in a dress shirt and tie. He appeared to be a businessman in the photo; only his outstretched arms revealed him to be a ballet instructor. Oleg’s photo showed a confident man whose artistic persona was secondary to his status as a leader. Mireille’s photo contrastingly showed a pretty, feminine dancer dressed in a form-fitting leotard and tights. She could not have been mistaken for anything but a woman and an artist. The assumptions of the newspaper journalist likely contributed to these representations, but Oleg and Mireille also influenced such depictions. Because their pictures were published the morning of the first day of the WVBF, their photos were likely publicity pictures they submitted for the article rather than candid shots taken by a photojournalist at the WVBF.


142 “For First Ballet Festival.”
In the WVBF newspaper articles, the Brianskys’ different roles also applied to their prior balletic careers. One entry noted that “a lifetime dedicated to the art of ballet, with brilliant success both as a dancer and as a choreographer and teacher, has endowed [Oleg] Briansky with an unusual ability to work with and promote the talent of young dancers.” The same article highlighted Mireille’s wedding to Oleg and her work as a director of children’s ballets: “Much of her success in teaching young dancers lies in her ability to blend extraordinary understanding and undeniably gentle approach . . .” According to the article, Oleg was accomplished in the professional balletic world of adults and was able to effectively advance his students’ careers. In contrast, the article highlighted Mireille’s work with pre-professional children. This experience, and her non-threatening manner, equipped her to nurture young talent within the privacy of the dance studio.\footnote{143}{“For First Ballet Festival.”} \footnote{144}{“For First Ballet Festival.”}
After 1968, most of the choreographers and directors of the subsequent WVBF guest companies were also male. Female guest artists taught and performed at the WVBF but were rarely directors of a professional company, which reflected trends in professional concert dance, in which men most often led renowned professional companies. Rose’s chairmanship consequently mirrored the structure of these professional troupes. The WVBF thus gained social and artistic legitimacy within its guests’ professional balletic culture. When the WVBF transitioned into the WVDF, Fagan’s leadership and relationship with regional and national male artists continued to mirror the gendered structure of the national balletic world.\textsuperscript{145}

The relationship between guest teacher Noble and West Virginia teacher Schrader underscored some of the differences between regional female artists and nationally-known professional teachers. Schrader managed and taught her school, the Schrader Youth Ballet, in Parkersburg, West Virginia. She worked extensively with Noble, repeatedly hosting him as a guest teacher and choreographer in her school. Noble taught and mentored her students. He also brought in male students from the NCSA to perform in shows he choreographed and/or staged for the school. These young NCSA guests acted as partners to Schrader’s overwhelmingly female students.\textsuperscript{146}

After Noble’s death, Schrader received a phone call from an NCSA faculty member. The school was staging one of Noble’s choreographic works and realized that they were using the incorrect music. Schrader recalled that they told her “a lot of these things [Noble did] we don’t know. [But] we know that he worked with you a lot.” Despite her close relationship to Noble, Schrader said “I was so shocked. I said ‘you’re calling me?’” Schrader’s connection to Noble


\textsuperscript{146} Schrader, 2011.
gave her a particular prestige with the NCSA faculty, but Schrader was surprised that her link with Noble was acknowledged outside the West Virginia concert dance community. Their work together did, however, consistently add to Schrader’s status within the festival community. In 1989 for example, Schrader reinforced her classification of her troupe as a “company” with a performance program she sent to Nancy Herholdt of the DCH. The booklet announced the Schrader Youth Ballet choreographic premiere of “I Lombardi” by Noble. It also noted “funding for Mr. Noble provided by a grant from the W. Va. Arts and Humanities.” Schrader’s connection to Noble also linked her to Fagan’s effort to provide DCH funds for guest artist residencies in West Virginia schools.\(^\text{147}\)

Noble wrote a section for the collaborative “Tribute to Duncan Noble” performance program, in which he explained his choreographic concept. Noble celebrated Schrader, giving her credit for inspiring him to choreograph the program. Rose also contributed to the written program with his thoughts concerning Noble’s influence on ballet in West Virginia. But Schrader did not publish her own words in the program that advertised her school’s performance. Schrader’s status developed from her connection to Noble, as well as from her own teaching abilities. While Noble and Rose’s prominence derived from their artistic work, Schrader’s prominence was rooted in her relationship with Noble as well as her artistic efforts. Noble and Rose were men whose value was based in their actions. Schrader was a woman, and her value was an extension of who she was: Noble’s close friend and associate.\(^\text{148}\)


Schrader respected Noble’s influence on her school and her students. She remembered Noble’s particular encouragement of all male students, no matter how rudimentary their abilities. She discussed an event wherein a male guest teacher was not supportive of two male students who took his WVDF class. She said “Oh, Duncan would have loved them. He would have encouraged them so much. Because how do you get boys to dance anyway?” Schrader considered Noble’s presence to have been influential for all WVDF students, but she believed his special patronage of male WVDF students was essential. As a professional teacher and former dancer, he offered them a role model. As a member of the NCSA faculty, he offered some an opportunity to train in a pre-professional school.149

Students at the WVBF/WVDF trained in a regional artistic community, and many hoped to advance their training through out-of-state pre-professional programs. More female students danced at the WVBF/WVDF than male, but WVBF/WVDF male students had greater opportunities to continue their training pre-professionally because there were fewer male students in concert dance as a whole. Talented female and male students were able to deepen their association with concert dance through their WVBF/WVDF experience. Yet their experiences in concert dance were often profoundly influenced by their gender.150

**Girls and Boys at the West Virginia Ballet Festival/West Virginia Dance Festival**

The WVBF/WVDF was a regional part of a broader dance culture that was highly gendered. Women and men influenced the WVBF/WVDF community in diverse, gender-characterized

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149 Schrader, 2011; Mishoe, 2011.
ways. Female dance teachers heavily outnumbered male dance teachers at the WVBF/WVDF, and correspondingly, female students also heavily outnumbered male students. In 1968, thirty-five female students performed at the WVBF concert alongside three male students. Four female teachers/choreographers were listed in the program, while Rose was the only male teacher. Two years later, one hundred two female students performed with three male students. There were six female teacher-choreographers in the program, but again, Rose was the only male. Female numerical dominance created a supply-and-demand atmosphere at the WVBF/WVDF (and in the national concert dance community). Festival coordinators and guest teachers often encouraged male, rather than female, students to continue their training because of their comparative scarcity. The gendered WVBF/WVDF environment, and the gendered culture of national concert dance, resulted in very different artistic experiences for female and male students.¹⁵¹

Hay explained that male students often gained access to opportunities that their training had not yet prepared them to encounter. She explained that, although “far too much was expected of them” early in their training, guest teachers did not require them to be as polished as their female peers: “. . . I find if a boy is any good and he’s interested, he usually has a good chance of getting into a school or company. . . . Of course if they’re male, they can’t fail . . .” She stated that male students were also important at the WVBF/WVDF because they participated in partnering or pas de deux classes. Girls who did not have the opportunity to work with boys at their home studios were thus able to learn the basic aspects of dancing with a partner.¹⁵²

WVBF student Dr. Elizabeth Hay-Martin recalled that when she attended the earliest festivals only female students were present. At her home school, men occasionally served as partners in performances but did not train as dancers or dance by themselves onstage. Hay-

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¹⁵² Hay, 2011.
Martin noted that “the first guys I remember seeing dance were from Jerry Rose’s studio and they were twins [Peter and Paul Frame].” Both brothers won scholarships to the NCSA through the festival and subsequently secured scholarships to the intensive academic-year program. They later danced professionally with the New York City Ballet. Peter won his first NCSA scholarship when he was in the eighth grade. Unusually, he had only been dancing for three months at the time.153

Hay-Martin won a scholarship to the NCSA summer program after she had been dancing for ten years. Her training and talent helped her gain the summer scholarship, but she quickly discovered that the pre-professional world already considered her to be “too old” and without the ideal balletic body. This situation was hardly uncommon; as dance scholar Nedra Rhone explained: “In ballet, body type can make or break the career of an aspiring ballerina and it usually cannot be determined until after the age of 13, five or more years after girls have been dancing consistently.” Conversely, a boy’s body type rarely determined his ability to dance professionally. Hay-Martin felt that her experience at the WVBF initiated her desire to dance professionally but also helped her accept that she would not be able to do so: “It didn’t mean I couldn’t dance, it just meant I wasn’t going to do it for the rest of my life . . .” Although she was only two years older and much more advanced than Peter when he attended the NCSA summer program, her chances of winning a place for the academic year were slim. As a girl, Hay-Martin was one of many who competed to train intensively at the NCSA. As a boy, Peter was a scarce commodity rather than an over-abundant resource.154

Like Peter, Hay-Martin continued to train throughout her adolescence. But she did not perform professionally. When she began her chiropractic career and was unable to dance

153 Hay-Martin, 2011; “Beckley Students Dance away with all Three Scholarships Awarded at 3rd Ballet Festival.”
154 Rhone; Hay-Martin, 2011; Skulte; Hanna.
regularly, Hay-Martin decided to stop dancing altogether. Returning to the WVBF after six weeks of not dancing, she found that “I hurt so badly I was sick, and I thought, ‘I can’t do this.’” Charleston-area artist and WVDF attendee Kim Pauley also trained intensively as a young girl. She attended progressively festivals as a student, a guest performer, and a teacher-choreographer. Pauley, like Hay-Martin, trained at pre-professional balletic programs but did not perform professionally outside the state. In contrast, Huntington-area artist and WVDF attendee Nick Mishoe followed a path that was similar to the Frames brothers’ careers. He trained at the NCSA summer program and throughout the academic year. After graduation, he danced with the Boston Ballet and the Dutch National Ballet.  

The divergent career paths of female and male festival students were influenced by their exposure to the festival guests. Noble, for example, embodied a path into pre-professional dance for West Virginia students. His approval honored the WVBF/WVDF artists and gave students the knowledge that they had the ability to excel in the professional world. Mishoe recalled being deeply influenced by Noble and other professional male artists and teachers at the festival:

...Taking classes from the great David Howard and Duncan Noble, and getting positive support from teachers and other students was immensely beneficial for me. Also, Mr. Noble would bring male students with him from the North Carolina School of the Arts. Taking technique and partnering classes with them was very beneficial to my dance education. I think it also validated me as an adolescent male who was doing something that was socially viewed as wimpy and girly. Fortunately, I was homeschooled so I didn't have to deal with social pressures at school. ... When I first saw [guest performer] Simon Ball, who was about sixteen at the time, dance the “Diana and Acteon” pas de deux, I was sold on the power of male dancing. [I] couldn't wait to learn what I needed to [do in order] to dance that strongly.

As a student of a female teacher in a school with female students, Mishoe was thrilled to find male role models at the WVDF. He became friends with the NCSA students Noble brought to

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the event and learned how to perform the specific work required for male dancers. This contact with professional and pre-professional male artists at the WVDF gave Mishoe an understanding of the privileges and responsibilities of a male dancer.\textsuperscript{156}

Schrader believed that Noble’s festival work benefitted all WVBF/WVDF students, but that his presence was essential for the boys at the event. Mishoe felt that Noble’s mentoring was a major cause of his eventual career success: “Mr. Noble . . . played a key role in my recruitment into NCSA. After training there for three years, I was able to get a job dancing with the Boston Ballet. The fact that I had trained at the reputable NCSA played a key role in my getting that job.” As a professional teacher and former dancer, Noble offered students like Mishoe a male role model. As a member of the NCSA faculty, he offered some an opportunity to train in a pre-professional school.\textsuperscript{157}

Whereas Mishoe and the Frame brothers had Rose, Noble, De Marco, and Howard as role models, female WVBF/WVDF teachers served as examples to Hay-Martin and Pauley. Rose and the male guest teachers at the WVBF/WVDF performed professionally and were connected to a national concert dance community. Female guests with professional backgrounds, like Mireille Briansky who “assisted” her husband, often served less prominently, although no less significantly, than their male peers. Many of the female guests, including Simpson and Bahr, worked in regional communities throughout their pre-professional and professional careers. Female WVDF/WVBF teachers similarly directed and taught their regional West Virginia schools.

\textsuperscript{156} Rose, 2010; Mishoe, 2011; “Beckley Students Dance away with all Three Scholarships Awarded at 3\textsuperscript{rd} Ballet Festival”; “Beckley Dance Students Win Valuable Scholarships”; “Local Dancer Signs with New York Ballet Co.”; Paul Frame; “The Academy of Dance Arts: Our Faculty.”

\textsuperscript{157} Mishoe, 2011; Rose, 2010; “Beckley Students Dance away with all Three Scholarships Awarded at 3\textsuperscript{rd} Ballet Festival”; “Beckley Dance Students Win Valuable Scholarships”; “Local Dancer Signs with New York Ballet Co.”; Paul Frame; “The Academy of Dance Arts: Our Faculty.”
Conclusion

West Virginia teachers, guest teachers, and students at the WVBF/WVDF were connected to a national concert dance community, but female WVBF/WVDF artists like Dickinson, Hay, and Schrader often spent the bulk of their careers working in regionalized aspects of this national community. They were deeply connected to their students and peers who supported the existence and practice of regional concert dance. Male artists like Rose also operated within West Virginia concert dance. Simultaneously, however, Rose forged extended connections to national concert dance. He was linked to the guest artists of the WVBF through his chairmanship, and his relationship with Fagan closely associated him with the WVDF guest artists as well. Fagan was similarly connected to both West Virginia and national concert dance through his administrative work at the NEA, DCH, and NARB.\textsuperscript{158}

All WVBF/WVDF artists were connected to a regional and a national concert dance community. Yet their identities were shaped through the nature of their connections, which were deeply influenced by their genders. Several male artists left West Virginia to study, perform, and/or teach within the highest ranks of the pre-professional and professional world. Contrastingly, female artists like Schrader often gained an understanding of the trends present in concert dance across the nation through their contact with professional guests like Noble. They worked within their regional communities to perform, choreograph, and train students who hoped to enter the professional world.

Conclusion

“Some Days You Gotta Dance:” Reviewing the West Virginia Ballet Festival/West Virginia Dance Festival

“Nothing is more revealing than movement.”

In 1997 three administrators engaged in a series of letters concerning the WVDF. They discussed the format and purpose of the festival and questioned the nature of its educational role. Doug Perks (Curriculum Coordinator for Jefferson County) wrote to Nancy Herholdt (Director of Events at the Division of Culture and History/DCH) and Joseph Spurgas (Principal of Harpers Ferry Junior High School) concerning the educational format of the West Virginia Dance Festival (WVDF). They debated how public schools should handle the absences accrued by students who attended the event. Spurgas’ daughter planned to participate in the WVDF, and Perks recommended that she receive a “Leave of Educational Value” excused absence. Although this would allow her officially to miss school in order to attend the WVDF, her absence would count against her attendance record.

The letters Perks and Herholdt wrote concerning this issue revealed how the WVDF was perceived by Perks, a non-artistic educational administrator, as well as how the DCH presented and managed the WVDF. Herholdt explained the history of the festival, its current format, and its educational significance in her letter:

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160 Nancy Herholdt Division of Culture and History Director of Events to Doug Perks Jefferson County Curriculum Coordinator February 5, 1997, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, February 5, 1997; P.D. Perks Jefferson County Curriculum Coordinator to Joseph Spurgas Principal Harpers Ferry Junior High School February 27, 1997, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, February 27, 1997.
Originally, the festival was solely performance oriented. Small pockets of dance schools were struggling to create dance conferences at a regional level. They wanted to provide opportunities for their dance students and teachers to learn from instructors outside of their community, knowing that many schools were not able to travel en masse to out-of-state conferences. We worked with the dance schools to merge their ideas and needs into the present format of the festival. The State of West Virginia has established a programming prototype for other states to follow in support of dance and our festival has become a model for similar efforts in other parts of the country.

Our goal is to produce an annual offering for dance as an art form that supports the creative efforts of West Virginians working in that discipline. We also contribute to the continuation of dance through this support and by providing educational experiences for the next generation of dancers, teachers and advocates.

Herholdt explained that the WVDF served all West Virginia concert dance groups “who chose to audition” and maintained that “it is an honor to be chosen to participate.” She represented the WVDF as an asset to West Virginia concert dance as a whole but simultaneously insinuated that the event served only well-qualified students. Herholdt linked excellence in West Virginia performance dance to the WVDF and suggested that the festival had created an exceptionally high standard of concert dance in the state. Her depiction described the efforts of the first group of WVBF teachers and founders, the DCH administration of the WVDF, and the numerous students, teachers, and guests who attended the events.161

The West Virginia teachers who attended festivals, their students who participated in classes and performed in the festival concerts, out-of-state professional guest artists, and festival administrators contributed to an artistic community that changed West Virginia concert dance. Like many professional urban companies, the WVBF/WVDF grew out of the mid-to-late century concert dance boom. Consequently, the festivals incorporated many of the trends present in professional concert dance at this time. The WVBF, for example, was a primarily balletic event, but the WVDF included an increasing amount of non-balletic classes. Yet the WVBF/WVDF was also a regional event that differed from professional urban dance in significant ways.

161 Herholdt to Perks, 1997; The WVDF “audition” did not disqualify any group from participation; it determined students’ class level placements and helped adjudicators assign troupes’ performance slots.
The earliest festivals were coordinated by balletic teachers and their spouses. Like many non-urban balletic artists, they created a regional venue for their artistic work. Later, the WVDF was administered by the DCH, and Commissioner Norman Fagan used National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funds to support the event. In the absence of an in-state professional troupe, Fagan was able to access these funds to encourage the festivals’ non-professional concert dance. The WVBF/WVDF embodied a gendered balletic culture that was connected to but different from the gendered culture of professional ballet. Female artists worked successfully within their regional communities. They taught and worked with regional male artists, but these men also frequently found success in professional urban ballet.

In her 1997 letter, Herholdt legitimized the WVDF by asserting that the event provided students with opportunities to fulfill Department of Education objectives requiring them to “watch, critique, and discuss a performance.” Herholdt’s note to Perks concluded “while your current policy does not call this opportunity an educational field trip, perhaps the assurance that objectives can be met and documented will enable you to reconsider this particular situation.”

As a state employee who coordinated this artistic event, Herholdt was in an exceptional position to promote the image of the WVDF. In her letter, she continued the connection that the WVDF had advocated since its 1977 inception, associating a West Virginia identity and outstanding training in performance dance.162

In his letter to Spurgas, Perks revealed that he understood the WVDF to be a gendered event. He wrote, “I am certainly in agreement that what your daughter specifically and all of the young ladies generally are involved in is a marvelous experience.” Perks conveyed his perception that, as performance dance event, the WVDF exclusively served girls rather than mixed-gendered groups. His statement was informed by the reality of disproportionate numbers.

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162 Herholdt to Perks, 1997.
of female-to-male concert dance students, which resulted in the mainly-female WVDF population, but his assertion also perpetuated the idea that girls were dancers and boys were not. Thus, Perks’ gendered understanding of the WVDF both reflected and created larger numbers of female than male dance students.\(^{163}\)

The 1997 correspondence between Perks, Herholdt, and Spurgas shows that the WVDF was associated with regional, artistic, and gendered characteristics at this time. As she stressed the honor organizers bestowed on students when they chose them as participants, Herholdt linked West Virginia with balletic excellence. In his letter, Perks suggested that “dance” was synonymous with “female.” He showed that the historic gender-differentiations in ballet continued to factor into a 1997 observer’s understanding of ballet.

A gendered characterization of dancers has continued to be a major aspect of concert dance. In the popular reality television show *Dance Moms*, dance teacher Abby Lee Miller traveled with a group of young girls as they competed in dance competitions. When one girl was preparing to perform a solo in the same category as a boy from another school, she was unusually nervous. Miller explained: “Any time boys show up, it’s much tougher to win. And don’t forget, we have two male judges out there. So sometimes they go with the boy because they want to keep those boys dancing.” A similarly gendered atmosphere was present at the WVBF/WVDF. Male students were welcome but exceptional assets to the festival. Their scarcity meant that, compared to their abundant female peers, they were often able to gain access to more opportunities for pre-professional study. Many female WVBF/WVDF students also continued to train intensively in concert dance, but girls frequently succeeded in their regional balletic communities rather than in the national world of renowned professional companies.\(^{164}\)

\(^{163}\) Perks to Spurgas, 1997.

A 2010 letter to school principals signed by DCH Commissioner Randall-Reid Smith used similar wording as the 1997 letter from Herholdt:

The West Virginia Department of Education has a dance curriculum requirement based on national standards. . . . the curriculum lists objectives for watching, critiquing, and discussing dance performance. These opportunities are available to all dance participants during the course of the festival. Upon qualification, advanced dance students also will have the opportunity to fulfill work experience requirements.

With the assurance that objectives can be met and documented, I respectfully request that you consider this an educational field trip for those dance students in your school who have been selected to participate in the 2010 West Virginia Dance Festival.

In 2010, the WVDF continued to serve a community of West Virginia artists who were associated with a regional and a national concert dance community. Since the conception of the WVBF, teachers and administrators aligned the event with national concert dance trends but simultaneously modified the festival to serve its regional dance community. When the first festival occurred in 1968, individual West Virginia teachers changed concert dance in the state through their formation of the WVBF. They identified themselves as both “balletic artists” and “West Virginians.” The meaning of these terms have altered somewhat throughout the existence of the WVBF/WVDF, but the performance dance community attending the WVDF has continued to promote educational, technical, and artistic excellence in West Virginia concert dance.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Randall-Reid Smith Division of Culture and History Commissioner to Principals February 26, 2010, Division of Culture and History, West Virginia Dance Festival Manuscript Collection, West Virginia State Archives: The Cultural Center Capitol Complex, Charleston, West Virginia, February 26, 2010.
Office of Research Integrity

December 17, 2012

Lauren Angel
401 10th St, Apt. 1103
Huntington, WV 25701

Dear Ms. Angel:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract titled “West Virginian Dancers: The Creation and Development of the West Virginia Ballet Festival/West Virginia Dance Festival Community.” After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study is an analysis of publicly available information it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director
Office of Research Integrity
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