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**FELLOW of 2007**

**BALLET TRAINING RESEARCH AROUND THE WORLD**



Denmark	Copenhagen	<a href="#">Danish Royal Ballet</a>	08 - 15 Sept
Germany	Hamburg	<a href="#">Hamburg Ballet School</a>	15 - 22 Sept
France	Nanterre	<a href="#">Paris Opera National</a>	22 - 25 Sept
Russia	Perm	<a href="#">Perm State Academy</a>	26 - 28 Sept
China	Beijing	<a href="#">Beijing Dance Academy</a>	22 - 27 Oct
Asia	Korea	<a href="#">School of Dance Korea National Arts</a>	27 - 03 Nov
USA	San Francisco	<a href="#">San Francisco Ballet</a>	03 - 11 Nov
C.America	Cuba	<a href="#">National Ballet School of Cuba</a>	11 - 18 Nov

**Object:**

Having been through a typical training system here in the UK, and now a teacher myself I have a strong interest in how other schools in different countries and cultures train their fellow dancers with minimal injuries.

Nearly ten years ago I sustained an injury whilst training as a dancer and felt let down with the recovery process that was offered at that time. This resulted in me leaving for an alternative degree in photography whilst continuing as a dance teacher at a local school.

When this opportunity came up, I put together a list of top ballet schools with some help with professionals in the dance world. Not only did this give me a foot in the door to many important schools, which would of never happened without the trust fund. I was able to meet some very inspiring teachers, see top musicians and more importantly watch tomorrow's future dancers unfold in some of the best establishments.

This opportunity has opened my eyes to all the different teaching techniques and thoughtful structured timetables and to see how a Culture and society can transform the way in which a whole school can operate.

Ballet is a very dedicated form of art and physical sport that can vary hugely from the state of art schools providing top notch training, right to schools that just don't have the resources.

Starting in Denmark, I visited the Danish Royal Ballet School for the duration of one week, which was an excellent starting point and gave me the confidence to continue the journey with a healthy attitude. There was no language barrier and they opened their arms enthusiastically, I was able to view the accommodation offered, meet the staff and teachers and observe every level of class. The standard was very good right the way up through the school and they offer a great exchange programme for teachers and pupils. This obviously broadens the education and allows the pupils to have international input (a realistic way into the professional job). I was able to see rehearsals for the Christmas show, and a professional show by the company to see what the pupils can aim for.

The strongest point of the Danish Royal was perhaps the fact they have the school and company sharing work space and studios so they are able to have that important goal just in front of them constantly. As students wonder the hall ways moving from class to class they can often find themselves passing the company members. This made the whole professional/training bubble seem more friendly and less cliky than other schools and establishments.

Children start their training in socks, so they learn to use their feet properly and don't 'roll' the foot, which can lead to terrible long sustaining injuries. This was a very thoughtful and I thought clever to embed this at an early age.



Photograph 1. Danish Royal Ballet School September 2007

Injury rates at the Danish Royal seem average but they are on top of it, they have a couple of full time physiotherapists that offer a drop in session, also you can book in for half hour appointments on a regular basis. Everything is recorded, parents are kept informed, this was one of the smallest schools but one of the best kept and managed.

My next leg of the journey took me to the John Neumeier School in Hamburg Germany, another great school that crossed over the school and company in their environment. The physiotherapist let drop in to spend some time observing the treatments offered. This was really impressive, hot mud clay packs, infrared therapy, deep massage and a huge pressure bath for injured muscles! The common problem in the schools was the lack of time, unfortunately this means students and professional dancers are given limited time one to one with a physiotherapists.



Photograph 2. John Numier School September 2007

Paris Opera Ballet School is a hidden gem within the business area of Nanterre. After finding the building and introduced to the school I soon realised that my lack in international language skills may hold me back on any answers for my research. Still dance is a visual art and I was able to see the results right in front of me.



Photograph 3. Paris Opera School September 2007

The standard is clear in Paris, every student looks alike and the technique is impeccable, classes are very regimented and serious. I was blown away with the bows and curtseys from training students to myself, a rule that has passes through the schools from generation. I was unaware of any treatments for the dancers but also there was no evidence of students sitting out of class.

Perm Academy had been running since the WW2, but has only recently been put on the map in Russia. When I began my research I had a list of schools advised to visit, unfortunately many would not allow my visit and the only school that gave me permission was Perm State Academy. This was still a Russian School that was introduced after the evacuation of the Majinsky theatre in 1941.



Photograph 4. Perm State Academy September 2007

The studios are raw wooden floors that the students have to spray the down with water between exercises to hold their feet securely in flat turn out. The classes were the strict, a feeling of a cold atmosphere and suppressed happiness. After a few days it was wearing on me and I found it hard to observe.

It was fascinating to see the Russians do what they do well, they have their own style and technique that seemed précised, the teachers range from dancers that work as both dancers and teachers the older generation that can only sit at the front and shout orders.

Next my journey took me to Beijing Dance School in China, this was a real example of how the Chinese train in every aspect, they are hard workers and want to achieve the highest standard. Situated on campus there are over two thousand students and qualified teachers with their families. To imagine the scale, placed centrally is a hospital that provides Chinese traditional medicine, acupuncture and care, two restaurants and a shop.

As I ventured out in the evenings of the schools grounds covered with students at their own will, going through choreography and rehearsing. Studios filled with pupils daring each other on for some multiple turns, it was quite a different attitude to dance than I had seen before. There's obviously a competitive air about any dance school but in Beijing there is a feeling of unity and strength.

Classes are just as strict as that of Russia but with out the fear factor, they all strive for the same high ability. They work very differently from other schools, introducing gymnastics from a young age and grow up training in traditional Classical Chinese dance which requires a flexible spine.



Photograph 5. Beijing Dance Academy October 2007

They use their own medicines above western practices to cure injury and with such a high national population the school can afford to be selective in the students they allow in. I had never seen so many boys in a school and was amazed to see single sex classes full running at every age level.

The same alternative practices occurred in Korea at the National Arts, they use similar methods, with a calm atmosphere within class. Teachers in Korea hardly raise their voice and are keen on teaching the students a lot about anatomy and health. This aids the dancers with the knowledge they need to know in able to prevent injury.



Photograph 6. University of Korea National Arts October 2007

It is compulsory to train in Pilates for every student on the timetable and must attend theory classes, they are aided with plenty of international reading and have professors working on campus. Teachers are regularly flown over from Germany and Hong Kong to allow students to have a very broad training. Teachers are allocated slots in the annual timetable for training and they provide everyone with accommodation.



Professor at Korea National Arts Introduces me to traditional Korean Food

Back to western food, no more rice and no language problems, next stop San Francisco Ballet School. This is a very modern school, with a real selection of mixed ability dancers throughout. The school itself has some lovely studios and a real range of teachers. It reminded me of the British way, class structure wise and relationships between teachers and students..



Photograph 7. San Francisco Ballet School November 2007

This is a society that many are expected to have private health care insurance regardless of if you are a dancer or not so you would expect top quality injured free students, yet this showed the highest amount of students 'sitting out' of class. The school is small and close knit but came across as the most competitive amongst the students so far.

Cuba had to be one of the most exciting schools to visit, Cuba National Ballet. I didn't know much before I went and was blown away with the different ways in which they work.

This school had very minimal resources and set in an old town building with open arched windows. The weather in December is hot so students are always warm and loose and flexible. Everyday in class the first exercise taken is a warm up unlike the standard plies here in the UK. It's a good ten-minute routine that uses every part of the body. Everyone dances with love here, you can't take your eyes off them for a moment they were captivating. The pianos were horrendously out of tune, the floors all warped, mirrors just propped up if any at all the toilets were flooded, Yet these were the best dancers I'd seen. I was able to watch class with the little ones right up to the professional company.

The Cuban's are born into dance, everyone is a part of the culture some how if you don't dance you watch it and if you don't watch it you still have the knowledge.

You could stop some one on the street and they would be able to tell you the tales of prima ballerina Alicia Lonze or the famous Carlos Ascosta.

I felt as if I had stepped back in time, in the days of when dancers were treated like royalty. It is a very special place for ballet.

Unfortunately, the thieves are very good in Cuba and prey upon the alone tourists! I had become very relaxed with travelling at this stage in the trip and become very trusting of strangers. Suddenly I found myself in a very strange police station where no one understood or spoke English so I had to have the director of the ballet school come and translate everything. And then the formalities of going to the British Embassy where I joined a queue of other British tourists!

I have not let this spoil my time in Cuba and would love to return one day to visit the school again. The people of the dance school were very helpful and had lots to offer.

### **Conclusion:**

I spent some of my trip staying with local host families, this was a great advantage, I would advise any one to follow this route. It allows you to piece together the whole way of life no matter of the research. You taste the food, live the culture, and build a complete picture of the way of life, which allows you a better view and understanding. When travelling alone this I found was a great way to learn more and have company when feeling lonely.

I saw many inspiring things and aspects that I couldn't tolerate but that was all part of the learning curve. Everyone has a different way to get the best out of everyone, there were many highlights and I felt I got a very real idea from each school of how they go about their days.

In an ideal world we need to get every director from every school to sit with each other and discuss their own approaches, what they feel makes them different to other schools. To me, each school had positives in their own rights and I was lucky enough to have seen these at such an early time in my career. I am now able to put some things into practice and talk my own students about my experiences and tell them how others are working.

The obvious aspects that alter the training for students in schools for example diet, natural body shape and flexibility, knowledge and resources to medical attention if injured.

I have many people to thank for this project, I have been to places I thought I would never see in my life time, met people I thought not possible and seen things I feel very privileged.

I hope to one day that our Schools here in the UK will allow me to come and tell them about my journey and share my research. We all can learn so much from each other.

**Any Questions please contact me on 07713246 073 or via email [Kathie@kathiestrange.co.uk](mailto:Kathie@kathiestrange.co.uk)**

