
SUMMERDANCE

With nine months of pliés, pirouettes and grand jétés under their belts, you'd guess that when Winter Term ends, most students at the School of American Ballet head for the beach, put up their tired feet and catch up on some much needed R&R. You'd be wrong.

SAB's advanced students are year-round achievers, never abandoning the drive to improve and certainly never losing sight of their dreams of becoming professional ballet dancers. SAB's own Summer Course is the traditional gateway for advanced students from around the country and the world into the School's September-to-June Winter Term; so the 200 Summer Course slots are primarily reserved for new talent--which means SAB's Winter Term veterans must head elsewhere to continue honing their skills once summer rolls around.

The forced vacation from SAB, however, serves a very useful purpose. While many SAB students dream of joining New York City Ballet, summer provides a valuable opportunity for exploring the rest of the national ballet scene. "We want our students to get a broader picture of the dance world," explains Kay Mazzo, Co-Chairman of Faculty at SAB. "They should look at other ballet companies to find out if different styles and different cities appeal to them."

Such exploration is achieved by auditioning for and enrolling in summer sessions held by prominent ballet schools around the country. SAB's faculty maintains ties to major American ballet companies and their schools spanning the country from Miami to San Francisco and Seattle, and actively guides students towards the summer programs that will best suit them.

"They come and tell us where they're thinking of going, and if we feel it's a real stretch for them as far as what the heads of those schools and companies are looking for, we try to guide them in a different direction," says Mazzo. "But the students usually have a pretty good idea of where they want to go."

And, after completing a five to seven week summer course far from the SAB fold, students who return in the fall are usually a little older, a little wiser and equipped

with a better sense of where they'd like their professional careers to lead.

With adventures marked by both hard work and fun, four students share, in their own words, highlights of their recent summers away from SAB.

Sterling Hyltin, 16, Pacific Northwest Ballet School

I actually didn't know much about Pacific Northwest Ballet. I had never been anywhere else but SAB, so this summer was sort of an experiment. Suzy Pilarre told me that they would like me there and that I should give it a try. I enjoyed it a lot. The company was not in season while I was there, but they did come in to rehearse towards the end of the summer session. I got to watch a little bit of rehearsal for Don Quixote. We had a variety of classes including ballet, Spanish, jazz and modern. It was fun to go into jazz and modern classes because they were not as strict. That was time to let loose and have fun. Francia Russell, one of PNB's artistic directors, didn't really watch many of my classes because I was younger. But she teaches and watches the higher levels often. Some of the studios have windows up at the top where the administrative offices are, so Francia can watch class from her office. I would really like to go back to PNB next summer, but I might also want to try Miami, just to get myself known at other places and to experiment.

Emily Hayden, 16, Miami City Ballet School and ABT Summer Intensive/Orange County

This summer I went to Miami City Ballet's school in July and to American Ballet Theatre's summer intensive in Southern California in August. I wasn't really planning on going to two schools. It just sort of happened this year. I was really set on performing this summer, and I got to perform at Miami and ABT; so it really worked out well. At ABT we did excerpts from Raymonda, and Daniel Baudendistel set a piece on us that he had already choreographed. It was called Allegro Vivo, and in some ways it seemed sort of sacrilegious because it was set to the first movement from Bizet's Symphony in C. I didn't know how I felt about that, being from SAB. But he said that it was such beautiful music and that he was very inspired

by it to do something. His ballet was actually really beautiful, and it was so fun to dance . . . I loved Miami. For the performance I did the "Bluebird Pas de Deux" from *Sleeping Beauty*, and Roma Sosenko staged an excerpt from *Who Cares?* I was also in a new ballet that Avi Scher choreographed. Miami was more like SAB. In Miami we could wear pointe shoes for all of our classes. We had classes in the morning and then rehearsed in the afternoon until 4:30. ABT was a lot more intense. There we had classes from 9:30-12:30, followed by lunch and rehearsals until 5:30 p.m. After a dinner break we had more rehearsals. It really gave me a taste of what the schedule might be like when I'm in a company. But I think that SAB's classes are more intense, even if they don't take as much time. In the last week at Miami, sometimes we'd get to see the company members taking classes; and Miami City Ballet's artistic director Eddie Villella did teach our class once a week. I feel like a more complete dancer just from having all these different experiences. The summer programs were so intense that I got a lot stronger; and I was refreshed and ready to come back to SAB, too. I'm not sure where I'll go next summer. I have to get my driver's license; so I'm going to try to be home in August. But I would really love to go back to Miami or maybe try ABT's summer intensive in New York.

Daniel Ulbricht, 17, Chautauqua Institution (2000) and San Francisco Ballet School (2001)

My first summer after starting at SAB I went to the Chautauqua School of Dance in New York with Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux and Patricia McBride. There's a lot of performing there, and the session lasts seven weeks, which is longer than most. I think the performing experiences throughout the entire session are the reason I liked that program so much. Many programs will do one show at the end of the summer, but to work with choreographers creating ballets on you over a longer period of time is something a lot of people aren't used to; so it's good exposure and good practice for down the road. This year, I was just starting my apprenticeship with NYCB, and they didn't feel that I had enough repertory under my belt to go on tour this summer. But I really wanted to keep in shape and stay up on things, so I talked with Kay Mazzo and she paved the way for me to attend San Francisco Ballet School. I arrived a week late at the pro-

gram, but everyone was very welcoming anyway. Our schedule was pretty jam-packed. SF Ballet's Artistic Director, Helgi Tomasson taught class a couple of times. With him, there's a special feeling in the room, just like when Peter Martins or Kay Mazzo or anybody else who's danced with NYCB teaches. Jorge Esquivel, who is one of the pioneers of Cuban dancing, was a great teacher. In fact my teacher at home in Florida-his teacher was Jorge Esquivel. Working with Jorge was a wonderful experience because he exposed us to a different style of dancing. Just that diversity really rounds you out and that's what makes somebody a more versatile dancer. SF Ballet was rehearsing for one of their tours, and I had the chance to jump in at the end of a company class because a couple of my buddies were there. SF Ballet is incredible . . . I'm not going to lie. I feel lucky that I have my NYCB apprenticeship and still got the opportunity to go to San Francisco to be exposed to another style and more teachers. I still have my same ambition to dance for NYCB, but now it's even stronger because I feel I have more to bring to the company.

Avichai Scher, 17, Miami City Ballet School

Last year I was supposed to go to Miami City Ballet School, but I got injured about a month before the program started. I finally got to go to Miami this summer, so I was really excited. I did the New Choreography Workshop at SAB last year--I've always really wanted to choreograph and I want to get as much experience as possible. I called Linda Villella, the director of Miami City Ballet School, before the session started and asked her if I could choreograph for the student performance, and she said "Probably not, but we'll see when you get here." So I asked her on the first day of the program, and she said, "There definitely won't be time for that." I was really disappointed. Emily Hayden told me I should do it anyway. I told a couple of my other friends about it, and 10 people agreed to dance in my piece. I was surprised people volunteered because it wasn't really for anything. It was just for fun. Eight of the girls in my piece were from SAB and the other two had come to an SAB Summer Course. We worked every day during lunch, and then we stayed five or six times after classes and rehearsed. After our first set of rehearsals, I went to a teacher I really liked, Nancy Raffa, and told her I wanted her to come watch at some point. And then I started to think, maybe this really could

be in the show, and I started to ask some of the Miami City Ballet company members who were around to come watch. They thought it was really good. On the final week of the summer program, two days before the student performances, they told me my ballet could be in the show. After the first performance, Edward Villella told me how impressed he was.

And the company ballet mistress made a point of coming over and commenting on my ballet. I really felt successful. I had tried really hard to do something, and it actually happened. I never expected that. In terms of dancing,

I really loved Miami's overall program, and I feel that I really improved as a dancer. The fact that they had a



Avi Scher in Miami, with dancers from the ballet he choreographed

show at the end was one of the reasons I went because I really love to perform. I'm hoping to go back to Miami next summer, and if I do, I might call them ahead of time and say "I'm coming back, I'd like to choreograph again. Can we make it a little more official this time?" I think they were really pleased with what I did, so maybe I'll get a different answer next year. ❖

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