

DANCE THEATRE ♀ HARLEM

During a recent master class at Princeton University, a student asked about Arthur Mitchell's impact on my teaching. One of his gifts as a teacher was that he taught me to expect excellence, to never teach down to a person, but to inspire them to reach for their best. A teacher's job was not to just correct flaws, but to nurture each student's greatness, to recognize it and call it out even when they couldn't recognize it in themselves. Mr. Mitchell modeled the excellence he expected from his dancers. He walked the walk.

Always doing one's best is guidance for dance and for life. It's listed as one of Don Miguel Ruiz's Four Agreements:

“Always do your best. Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgement, self-abuse and regret.”

When I returned to DTH almost three years ago, the school was just starting to thaw from the isolation of Covid. Students seemed hesitant to take up space and tentative in their expression. Nevertheless, the seed of excellence was planted and the process of rebuilding was begun. Now, they are more embodied, more confident. In general, students have a stronger vision of themselves like something coming more clearly into focus. I can see it in their dancing and in the camaraderie in and out of the classroom. I witnessed it in their recent gala performance and hope to elaborate on it at this year's iteration of “Harlem Mouse/Country Mouse” at the Apollo Theater.

After Harlem Mouse, we will be preparing for our summer intensive, a time when students are able to focus primarily on their dancing which enables them to improve a lot in a short amount of time. The intensive invites stimulating interactions and expansion for both our year-round and visiting students.

Last year, we incorporated Wellness Wednesdays into the intensive as a way to mitigate injuries. Wellness Wednesdays gave students a day to focus on self-care and to understand it as an essential part of their dance/life practice. This year we will schedule yoga into their regular curriculum, not just on Wednesdays, to show them how it can more deeply support and impact their dance practice. And we will expand our Wellness time to include other creative, interactive, community building activities because learning is easier, when we are together, having fun.

School Director Tai Jimenez

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