

What follows is my “Professional Statement” but like most aspects of my life now it becomes a story: My devotion to my craft – my point of view about dance as living.

Professional Statement

When I started taking dance classes, I was twenty and at a small university in Alabama. There was something about movement that I innately understood – not the turns and jumps, but movement as a language - the turn of the head to indicate something had happened, the walk, the decent to the floor, the balance - pushing instantly into the air or the gravity that surrounds one as stillness arrives in the body. I stood in a college parking lot at about three in the morning and realized that I was a dancer - a recognition that has never left me. Six years later after dancing with Ballet West and several small modern dance companies in New York City, getting married, and having back surgery I danced my first principal roles with the Graham Company under Martha’s direction.

As a young dancer I had an awareness of dance as communication and it was this strong sense, I know, that must have brought me to Martha’s house – the Graham Company. I have done a lot of performing other than the Graham Repertory, but it is in her house I learned that dancing is not so much “communication” as it is “the act of revealing.” Whether in a rehearsal or a class or ultimately in performance, dancing reveals us – it reveals the “self.” How we take a correction or a note, the authority with which we move through a class or take on a role, how we listen and watch, how we apply what we see and hear, this to me is the heart of an individual’s dancing; and it is all revealing just as the way we live our lives is revealing.

Being a performer, a choreographer, and then an artistic director of a company for thirteen years has always been more a matter of courage for me than any thing else. The courage to step into a place that is dangerous (the studio, the stage, or the office) - a place that requires one to summon deep emotions, equally deep physicality, and decision making and communication skills, a place that demands one recognize within ones self many facets of the individual. Some of the work and dances have been joyous, but many others were absolutely gut wrenching. I have, and still do, summon my courage to continue from the conviction that people can recognize within my best work (dancing, choreography, directing, or teaching) – the necessary, if at times terrible, beauty of their living, as was the case in primitive cultures when dancers revealed life lessons by how they danced.

In all my work, from Martha’s ballets, to my work with Eliot Feld, to Jacques D’Amboise, to La Scala, to my own choreography and running my own company, I never approached a role, or a dance, or the company as “Donlin” dancing, say, Oedipus or “Donlin” dancing the work *Adieu* by Eliot, or “my” company --- it was always “Oedipus” by Donlin, or “Adieu” danced by Donlin; and the Company was intended to give a voice to dances that needed dancing by dancers who needed to dance. The Work comes first. So I listen to it and watch it to know what its demands are and only after I fulfill those demands (through the rehearsal process and through writing) can I add my own voice. This way of working sharpens my instinct, concentration, and perceptions and leads to an articulation of my own voice as a craftsman and artist.

Bertram Ross said to a dancer in class, “you can’t do this movement that way – you must love it to do it the way it should be done.” I realized that each movement demands a price from the individual. I have learned how much commitment is required to give rise to an authentic voice. And I know - that amount of commitment yields recognitions about my work, my love, and my living.