AMERICAN CREATIVE DANCE

THE STORY

THE VISION
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WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT AMERICAN CREATIVE DANCE?

There are many arts institutions in the world, large and small. What is special about American Creative Dance?

Creativity.

Not only does this company have a unique dance and musical style which allows all its performers to create their own work in performance, but it has a unique way of solving all creative problems connected with its work and performance.

Creativity is the highest of the higher order thinking skills that human beings can engage in. It is like yeast; a little of it in the world raises the entire body. It is, for many of those who believe in a divine being, the thing that is most godlike in humans, a way for them to participate in the creation of the world. For those who don't believe in that model, it is still the human faculty that solves apparently insoluble problems and moves individuals and groups forward into new areas of life and endeavor.

American Creative Dance is pouring creativity out into the universe, enriching the world beyond anyone's ability to see. Audience members have commented over the years about the impact that its performance has on them. We have heard spectators say that a performance of ours changed their lives. We hear over and over that people are inspired by our work to go out and live their lives with renewed confidence and strength.

And these remarks have been made when we are just doing what we do, making dance and music and art. Our intention is to bring the greatest joy to ourselves and to our audience, but we find that what we often bring is transformation of ourselves and others.

We have been able to have this kind of impact with very small annual budgets and virtually no assets other than our own very rich creative genius. We want to create even more good by having our total vision funded and operating.

This is the story and the vision. We invite you to join us in the most wonderful, sacred, exciting, transforming, productive endeavor we can imagine.
The modern dance revolution of the early twentieth century redefined dance in the West. Most of what is now called modern dance is elaboration of forms and ideas that are founded in developments of the last century. American Creative Dance stands in marked contrast to this trend and is producing work that has roots in the past, but is taking the art of dance to entirely new places.

In the early twentieth century many people were exploring the nature of dance and how to do it. Ballet, the art dance that grew out of the court dancing of France and had been elaborated in Paris, Russia, Denmark and elsewhere in Europe, was not meeting the needs of artists in the industrial age. The great innovators like Ruth Saint Denis and Ted Shawn looked to the dance traditions of other cultures such as India and Africa for inspiration and new ideas.

Many dancers were also looking at the human body and how it works for new ideas and new forms. The distortion of the body required for ballet movement was rejected in favor of more natural movement.

Perhaps the greatest of those innovators was Martha Graham. She created a dance vocabulary and aesthetic that have influenced dance ever since. In spite of the fact that she was not working in the ballet tradition, her work was largely responsible for the rejuvenation of that medium and led to changes and experimentation in ballet.

Graham's later work had different qualities than the strength and daring of her early Lamentations for instance. There is a story that she moved into a studio next to a ballet company and was forever influenced by that.

For whatever reason, most of the dance now called “modern dance” as opposed to “classical dance” i.e. ballet, looks like ballet without shoes. Modern dance choreographers create dances for ballet companies; modern dancers have classical training.

Twyla Tharp said in her memoir Push Comes to Shove that there is no longer modern dance and classical dance, but just dance.
American Creative dance is still interested in some of the issues raised by early modern dancers. These issues that the innovators in dance from the first half of the twentieth century raised have certainly not all been explored. We are interested in the relationship of the body to the earth, the relationship of dance to music, how bodies move and what kind of movement is good for dance, how dancers turn movement into art, what the art of dance is and how it is different from entertainment or gymnastics. All these questions, though perhaps defying definitive answers, remain.

It isn't that no one is addressing any of those issues to be sure. Twyla Tharp herself came out of the Judson Church "post modern" dance movement that explored many things including using "everyday movement" in dance. But the end result has been, in Tharp's case, more ballet without shoes. She herself trained as a ballet dancer. For some reason, in the West when all else fails, dancers fall back on ballet conventions.

When the rehearsal director of the Bill T. Jones Company was participating in an activity with another, more truly innovative dance company, the dancers were taking turns improvising alone in the center of a large circle of dancers who were making an accompaniment with hands and voices. The traditional "modern dancer" from the Jones Company took her turn and did the classical dance tour of barrel jumps all around the inside of the circle. This is a step that is usually done by the lead man dancer as part of his solo work at the grand pas de deux in classical dance.

When inspiration fails, Western dance falls back on ballet conventions.

And while there is nothing wrong with that, it is not the only choice.

Our system of dance has no classical conventions and provides endless solutions to creative problems.

To our knowledge it is unique in the world.

One convention of dance in the West, not only ballet, is that dance is done to music. Almost without exception, choreographers begin with the choice of a piece of music to dance to.

Some music that is danced to was written for that purpose by great composers such as Tchaikovsky, Chopin, and Prokofiev. Sometimes choreographers choose other music that interests them.
However it is chosen, the dance is then set to that music which determines the length of the ballet, most of its time qualities (fast, slow) and most of its force qualities. The music dictates much of the character of the dance.

One of the ways that the early modern dancers experimented was with this tradition. Martha Graham created dances without music which Louis Horst then composed music for. Merce Cunningham, who had been a Graham dancer, staged dance works which he said were not created to music but were performed simultaneously with music by John Cage.

American Creative Dance uses a system of musical accompaniment that permits the musicians to create with the dancers by following the movement. Here the dance leads but the music is part of the creation in an integrated whole.

As far as we know this is unique in the world.
At American Creative Dance, we free performers' creativity in a specific way to make dance and music.

In most dance performance in the Western world, the dancers are not creating but interpreting the creation of a choreographer, who may actually have lived a long time ago. The dancers are taught the movement needed for a work and then execute that movement. Depending on the kind of dance, they may have studied years to acquire the capacity to make the movement necessary for their art. They are highly skilled, but they are not creating the work, unlike the visual artist, the poet or novelist, or even the choreographer or composer.

Please note that American Creative Dance does not think that the work of other dance companies or traditions is not good. We admire greatly what others do. We are just putting into high relief how we are different from other dance institutions. As far as we know, no other dance company in the world does what we do.

American Creative Dance uses Van Ness Dance developed by its founder, which allows all the performers to be creators. It has roots in the modern dance revolution of the twentieth century but is very different from what one sees in most traditional modern dance companies. Somewhere along the way, modern dance stopped being radically different from ballet. Twyla Tharp is right; there is no longer modern dance and classical dance.

We at American Creative Dance wonder what happened to modern dance. We are continuing to explore some of the radical ideas that were part of the early modern dance revolution; ideas like how the human body moves and how movement can be used to make art, the relationship between the movement of the human body and the earth, the relationship of dance to music and to other arts, what dance really is.

Van Ness was trained in the late fifties and early sixties in traditional modern dance of the time, especially the Denis-Shawn tradition. She began her career interpreting other people's choreography and setting her own choreography on dancers.

While teaching classes to amateurs she read about a kind of improvisation based on solving specific movement problems. She adapted that system to her own uses and found that many of her students were able to dance and to create dances that they liked and that other students enjoyed.
Translating that system to the requirements of art and professional performance as opposed to recreation and fun became the work of several decades. At first, Van Ness continued to use traditional choreography for performance, but finally in the early 1990’s she discovered some keys to making art that allowed all the dancers to create.

The first of those keys was a system of integrated movement of the human body.

One of the interests of the early modern dancers of the twentieth century was in the nature of movement of the human body. Ballet, the only Western art dance of the time, requires a stylized movement that actually deforms the body. The turned out legs, stretched knees and feet, and dance on the toes are not natural movement of people and are acquired at no small cost to the dancer. Early modern dancers sought a "natural" movement.

Van Ness Dance does not claim to be "natural" movement. It does not, however, require its practitioners to deform their bodies. Most people who desired to do so and were willing to practice enough could probably acquire the basic movement skills of Van Ness Dance well enough to do it for recreation.

What characterizes Van Ness Dance is a system of movement of the entire body originating in the abdomen and lower spine. There are no steps in this dance. Raising an arm or a leg, however gracefully and beautifully, does not constitute a movement in this work. Every movement originates in the abdomen and lower spine and radiates out to the entire body. It is as though a string ran from that part of the body out to the legs and feet, trunk and head, arms and hands. When someone pulls the string, everything moves. The feet are pulled and pushed by the abdomen, the head is moved by it, the hands and fingers are pushed out and pulled back.

Moving from the abdomen allows dancers to use the breath effectively as well. The same muscles that initiate the movement also control deep abdominal breathing.

In this kind of dance, no part of the body is dead. Some contemporary dance is largely one of the arms or the legs with little movement of the rest of the body. Our dance has the entire body moving.
The second key to this work is controlling the movements in the elements of time, space, and force. All movement, whether it be of people, taxi cabs, cats, tree branches, takes place in time, in space, and is characterized by a certain level of force. That is physics, not art. We dancers use those elements to make art, just as the painter uses the optic properties of pigment to make paintings. At American Creative Dance, the use of these elements is the building blocks of our creations.

The time element is a continuum from slow to fast. Slow dance has few movements in any length of time; fast has many. The slowest dance is barely moving, the fastest a blur. The space element has many aspects: large to small, toward or away from fixed or moving objects or persons, up or down, etc. Force elements are on the continuum of forceful to forceless. Also the force, whatever its level, can be expended all at once in a stopped movement or gradually in a sustained movement. Our dancers are masters of using these elements of movement when they choose.

Much contemporary dance uses movement that is mostly slightly fast, slightly large, and slightly forceful. When the movement qualities themselves are not what the dance composition is about, this is not a problem, though such dance can become monotonous unless other theatrical qualities overcome it.

In our work, where the dance qualities predominate, we use the full range of movements through the three dimensions to create interesting and rich compositions.

Ensemble dance is achieved when the dancers coordinate their movements with others to solve group movement problems, taking into account time, space, and force elements.

Though it was not our intention, the dance that we do has affinities with the dance of other older societies, especially Japan and Africa. A number of audience members have commented on how our work reminds them of Japanese Butoh dance. The movement of Butoh also originates in the lower spine and abdomen. Our intensity is not unlike theirs.

Likewise, African dance, though very different in intention, has movement that relates to ours when the dancers move from the abdomen and not the limbs.

Early modern dance, seeking to free itself from ballet conventions, sought inspiration from the dances of ancient cultures. We find it interesting that, though we have not looked to other cultures, we have much in common with them.
High Risk Art:
The kind of dance work we use requires performers to be creators. It also involves huge risk. All dancers use their own bodies, not some other impersonal instrument such as the musician, the painter, or the writer does, to make art. All dancers are risking a great deal when they stand up in front of an audience. Our dancers are doing all that and creating their work in plain view under the audience’s eyes. Such high risk work demands a lot of support.

We at American Creative Dance understand how to empower people to create under pressure and in the glare of public exposure.

Part of our success lies in our belief about the nature of human beings. We know that all people are talented and that one of their talents is creativity. We don't think everyone wants to exercise their talents as a professional dancer. Nor do we think that everyone who does want to be a professional dancer is right for us. But, never would we say, as a distinguished teacher at the school of a famous ballet company did when speaking of the students who pass through their program, "talent is so rare." We believe talent is part of human nature and that all people are talented. If a professional dancer is not right for our work, it is not because they are not talented. We want to keep that fact in mind.

A rehearsal slogan we use is "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly; and we must be willing to do it badly until we can do it well." It stands to reason that the beginning of a project is the time when we will be awkward, when we will try things out, some of which we will keep and some we will discard, but that at first we need to just try lots of things out.

We know that we will do best and achieve most in an atmosphere of detached support for one another. We don't need to judge everything we do in the initial stages of projects; we just need to do them. Editing and selection come later.

We also know how to tell one another the truth. Every one of us has moments of self doubt and fear. That is the time when our colleagues can remind us of who we are and what our personal history is. We know that the most meaningful support is just to tell someone what they are doing or what they have done, without judgment or comment, just tell them what they have done or are doing. When we remember what
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we have done in the past, in spite of fears, we know that we can dare to do it again, to
go even further. When we hear what we are doing now, we can decide if we want to do
that again or try something else.

This kind of discourse may exist in other arts institutions, but we don't know of its be-
ing accepted, standard procedure anywhere else. Our very high risk work would not
likely succeed without it.

And, we know, too, that all our audience members are talented. We respect their tal-
ents and their creativity.

Perhaps this attitude is part of what helps audiences to be so moved by our work. They
recognize kindred souls. They know that we may be masters of what we do, but they
sense we believe that mastery of what is important to an individual is achievable by all
human beings.

Creativity is like yeast raising the whole. We at American Creative Dance are helping
to build up the world.
MUSIC

One of American Creative Dance's greatest contributions is in music.

Modern dance innovators of the twentieth century explored the relationship of dance to music and experimented with a number of possibilities, though most dance one sees today has reverted to the pattern that existed before the modern dance revolution. Even so, many modern dance choreographers today are different from ballet choreographers in choosing popular music instead of classical music for their work. Choreographers have set work to Patsy Kline. At this time Twyla Tharp's dance is showing on Broadway to Billy Joel's music in *Movin' Out*. It is a difference but not really an innovation.

In the West, dance is done "to" music." When a choreographer wants to create a dance, traditionally, he selected a piece of music and then set his dance on that music. Sometimes the music had been written specifically for dance as in the case of the ballets by Western composers such as Tchaikovsky and Chopin. Sometimes not.

The music selected determined a lot of things about the dance, at the very least its length and its time qualities.

Several early modern dance innovators challenged that way of working with music and interesting things developed. Few of those things have lasted.

The founder of American Creative Dance was interested in the matter of music as well as dance. She sought a way for the dance to be important in its own right, without the necessity of music at all. What she discovered as well was a system that permits music to be created with the dance, for the musicians to be partners in the process as well as the dancers.

Once the dance system was in place and dancers could make the movement impulses from the lower spine and abdomen and control those impulses through the dimensions of time, force, and space, dance composition was possible. Dancers can solve creative problems alone in solo work or in ensembles with other dancers. The patterns of the movement impulses establish the rhythm of the dance; the qualities of the movement give the structure.

Musicians who are willing to learn how to see the dance and to follow it (instead of a printed score for instance) can create music simultaneously with the dancers.
In the work of American Creative Dance, the musicians are free to choose among all of the entire range of sounds that they can make. Any instrument, including the human voice, maybe especially the human voice, can produce percussive sounds, for instance. Instruments can also make a rich variety of non-traditional sounds that the musicians of this company are encouraged to use.

The musicians work with the dancers to develop a vocabulary of sounds to fit the movement. Just as the dancers can create a study in movement that is large, forceless, stopped, and downward, the musicians can follow that study. If the dancers are skillful and create clear movements, the musicians can make sound compositions that parallel or contrast with the dancers’ choices.

While this would not have to be true in order for this system to work, it is a convention that the musicians of American Creative Dance avoid using music in recognized scales, preferring atonal composition in the tradition of contemporary classical music in the west.

Just as the dancers take great risks in this kind of work, so do the musicians. There is no printed score, there is no "right note," no one is telling them what choices to make. The musicians are out there in the moment making the choice as the work is performed.

The musicians also need and get the support the dancers do to be able to create in this way. We know how to tell them the truth. We know how to reflect to them what they are doing and what they have done.

Many musicians, indeed most performers, have a history of having been shamed in their work by conductors and directors, coaches, and teachers, colleagues and fellow musicians. Perhaps when those persons are under pressure to perform, they act this out on others, blaming them for not producing the desired result. Shaming and criticism, sometimes hurtful, personal criticism, are so prevalent in the art world that hardly any professional artist has gone unscathed by it.

American Creative Dance does not use this kind of discourse. In fact, it would be very difficult for us to create the works of art we do if we were to do so. Our performers are on the edge of the cliff, creating right there on the stage in the performance. There is no score for them to rely on; they have to do it themselves. What we must have is support.

The music we make could not be replicated any other way. It is part of what draws our audience in. In fact, some of our audience members come more to hear the music than to see the dance. That is fine with us. We rejoice in it.
WORKING WITH VISUAL AND VERBAL ARTISTS

Nearly every performance we do incorporates verbal and visual art: poems and drama, monologues, stories, art objects and, of course, costumes and stage lighting designed for us. Our company includes actors and a designer, but we also collaborate with artists who are not members of the company on specific projects.

Stage lighting by
Terry Wells

Sometimes the verbal art is performed alone and is the starting point for dance and music. We did an evening called *Purple with a Red* that featured readings of literature, mostly poems by women authors, each followed by a dance and music section that was inspired by the literature. Suzanne McCoy’s dramatic monologue *Vanilla* was given a dramatic interpretation on stage by a performer who then danced a piece inspired by the monologue with vocal accompaniment suitable to it.

In another evening, our actor Ann Folke Wells read a poem by Shelley that was the text for a piece of music by Rebecca Clarke, sung by one of our musicians and accompanied by dance. Sometimes the verbal art is performed simultaneously with dance and music. Ann Folke Wells also narrated the *Discovery of Coffee*, which was accompanied by dance and music in our evening called *Coffee*.
Sometimes, the company members create the verbal art and perform it themselves. Lena Gilbert created and performed a monologue for Coffee. Singer June Manale created text in addition to the sound of a musical accompaniment for a dance piece.

The creative problems here can be very complex. In the case of existing text that has been chosen for our use, obviously, one element of the work is already determined. The actors must decide how to deliver that text, just as all actors do, and that part of the work is not significantly different in some ways from traditional theater. The dance and music that accompany such performance, however, is created in our unique way.

What is different in our case is the general way we work. Actors make their interpretive choices with their colleagues, knowing that dance and music and perhaps visual art as well are incorporated in the performance. They are the ultimate arbiters of how they will deliver a performance, but their choices are made in the context of the rest of the performance. They are collaborating in a total integrated work.

Here, we excel at supporting one another and making it possible for performers to take the risks they must in order to create this work. A brilliant performer knew, without our ever having discussed it, that following a moment of verbal cacophony with several performers speaking at the same time, a striking choice would be to whisper; and she knew that she could do it. We often see these moments of inspiration because our way of working prepares for them.

As for the visual art, we have performed with art objects created especially for that purpose and others that were not, but that the dance was created to accompany.

Artist Don Werner created objects especially for our evening cosmic trio. He began the process with discussion with the dancers and with observations of the dancers and musicians in the studio. He thus had some ideas of what the movement was like. He then created objects for the dancers to use. Two of them were small enough that the dancers would actually hold them, pass them from person to person, in one case drape it around their body. The third was a large fixed object on the stage that the dancers moved in relation to. He was in contact with the performers as he created and invited visits to his studio to view sketches and the work in progress.

One of the objects that could be held in the dancer’s hands also made sound when it was in motion adding to the sound dimension of that work.
The dance work of this company is particularly adaptable to being used in relation to any art objects, even those not designed especially for this kind of performance. Since the dancers can move toward and away from and in any relationship to fixed or moving objects, they can make pleasing dance compositions in relation to works of art. The founder of this company, Nancy Van Ness, danced with the video installations of Jaime Davidovitch, whose work is represented in many of the world’s great museums of contemporary art.

The company’s designers create costumes and lighting for performances, collaborating with the performers to achieve integrated work. We are especially grateful to our lighting designer, veteran Terry Wells, who has created beautiful stage lighting with limited equipment and to our versatile Ann Folke Wells who creates costume effects and properties with very limited means. We look forward to their being able to have the best resources for these talented artists who have created fine work on a shoestring.
COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION

The dancers and musicians (and sometimes other artists) of American Creative Dance use a collaborative process to compose. This process requires that all the artists contribute to the composition, but it also means that the work is collective, not just the creation of one person.

This is actually both a very exciting and a very scary undertaking. One of the members of this company said that she felt as though she were jumping off a cliff in every rehearsal and every performance for a year! Once, when the dancers asked a singer to use words in her accompaniment, she was so terrified at first that she could not proceed. One of the dancers reminded her that she sings opera and oratorio regularly and brilliantly and those have words. Her response was, “Yes, but I just read the words, I don’t make them up.” Even performers like that one, who long for the opportunity to do this kind of work can be daunted by it. Most performers have little if any experience creating the work they perform, much less doing so as they perform it.

Not all performing artists want to do this kind of work. But some do. And those who do, even though they find it scary, long for the freedom to create. Another of our performers watching some rehearsal tape one day remarked that he had wanted to be in a dance company like this all his life.

Usually our creative process begins with group discussion and decisions about what creative problems to solve. The dancers have to identify which elements of movement (time, space, force) will be needed, what shades of those elements. Usually at least a preliminary sequence of elements is determined at this stage of planning. The musicians must identify the sounds that accompany those kinds of movement. If there are other artists involved in the project, they may want to think about how they will create visual images or text appropriate for the work under construction.
Once some ideas are deemed worth starting with, the group moves into the studio and starts to work. The dancers lead the way with studies (essays, initial attempts to solve the problems) of the movement qualities under consideration. The musicians follow the movement.

At this stage, discussion follows each study. Was this a good problem to tackle? Did we solve it? What did we do? How did it feel? What would we like to do differently? Do we want to throw all that out and start on another tack or is there some part of this we want to work on some more? Do we want all the performers to do all of this or do we want some solo variations? Were directions indicated to us that had not been anticipated before we started? The answers to these questions lead to further studies. The process of composition is launched!

If there are properties, sometimes art objects designed specifically for the work, we must use them in rehearsal until we can do so skillfully and artfully. The costumer has been in on all stages of the composition and at some point, we begin to work in costumes instead of rehearsal clothes.

There comes a time when we find that we have decided on which problems we want to work on now and we are solving the problems in much the same way each time because the solutions we have discovered are satisfying to us at the time. We may ask someone not involved in the creative process to let us know what they think.

Though we always know that this work is leading to performance, somewhere along the way, we begin to get it ready for the space where it will be performed.

The actual performances are just others in the series of possible solutions to the creative problems we have chosen. As serious professionals, by the time we show the work to the public, we are confident of the artistic merit and technical quality of any of the possibilities that might come out on a given occasion. It is true though, that people who see a performance on different dates might not see the same things.

What this kind of work delivers is great intensity of performance. We must be focused even more than most performers on our own work and on our collaborators. We are in a dialogue that many audience members find themselves drawn into. Our kind of performance has spontaneity and freshness and immediacy that grow naturally from our way of working together.

We are also equal partners in the creation of every performance and audiences sense that as well. We don’t just talk about respect for all human beings; we demonstrate one aspect of that every time we perform.

Our collaborative composition is very special.
STUDIES

Many artists of the West have used the word study, étude in French, to describe a kind of work. Chopin and Piazzolla wrote études as have many other classical musicians. Other dance companies perform études, sometimes to music with that name but not always. We at American Creative Dance proudly continue that tradition.

For us, studies are both experiments that have value in themselves and the building blocks of the compositions we perform.

We warm up with studies that let us do what musician Lena Gilbert calls taking out our box of crayons. Before we can do our work, we need to get out our tools. The tools of our creations are the movement system and accompanying sound that we use.

Every time we go into the studio, we do studies that use our basic movement and sound: studies that allow us to focus on the time, space, and force elements of dance and the sounds that accompany them. We always do a study in closing and opening movement and sound, in upward and downward movement, in forceful and forceless movement and in slow and fast. When we have time, we create studies in complex combinations of qualities.

The warming up studies usually allow us to work with the contrasting qualities of each element. We want to be able to make a wide range of movement and sound so that when we are creating we do not fall into the trap of using only one kind; we want a rich variety.

One of our favorite studies for warm up is an ABA study. If Mozart could make ABA musical compositions, that is good enough for us. An ABA study as we do it has three parts. The A section focuses on one movement quality and its accompanying sound and the B on its opposite quality. For example, we might do an A section that uses only forceful movement and sound. The B section would then have only forceless movement and sound. Then, we do another A section. Mozart's ABA studies repeated the A section nearly exactly as it was the first time. Our work just uses the same qualities a second time, thought many of the same movements may recur.
Studies allow us to work not only on perfecting our ability to make the required movement and sound but also to perfect our capacity to compose. The study allows us to practice both the techniques of dance and music but also use the creative skills we need in our work.

Every study is a little performance. We put a frame around each one, taking our places in the space and waiting in our basic standing position for a moment to separate what we are about to do from daily life and what was going on before. We do the study, articulating the internal changes with minute pauses to separate the ABA sections. We hold the last movement and then return to our basic standing position for another moment before returning to daily life.

The study is also the building block of work we show to the public in performances. Many of our performances have started with ideas, words, situations, emotions. We then need to translate those things into our dance system. We begin by defining which movement elements and what shade of each one is appropriate. Do we want movement that is fast or slow, large of small, outward or inward, up or down, going somewhere or in place, forceful, forceless, stopped, sustained. What degree or degrees of those qualities are needed? So forceful that we could break down walls or just a little bit forceful? Do we need a progression? An alternation?

The answers to those questions lead us to frame studies. Our response to the studies leads us to further studies and to series of studies that ultimately become the completed composition and the entire performance.

Our vision for this company is to have the leisure for daily company class where we could spend several hours just working on studies that help us to hone and perfect our techniques and our skills. This in addition to rehearsal of works in progress and things we want to show the public is a great luxury, but one that our artists deserve. Such attention to our artists will lead to richer and deeper gifts to offer the world as well.
OUR KIND OF ART

Art is the use of things or language to create objects or experiences that are beautiful but that can also transcend the physical world and connect the artist and any viewers to something greater than themselves.

Beauty is not necessarily pretty. We define pretty as easy to look at, experience, or hear; pleasing and attractive in a conventional way. Beauty is not necessarily either pleasing or conventional. It has structure, balance, harmony, richness of texture, but its elements may be so new or so striking to the viewer that they are not easily accessible. It may be necessary for the audience to attend and to seek these qualities, though the reward for doing so may be great.

The line favored by the dancers of American Creative Dance is asymmetrical and often bent and twisting. The stretched line, pointed toe, and floating qualities of much Western dance are not to be found in our work. We leave that to the ballet dancers and others. Our music is atonal and seldom has a regular beat, but rather irregular cadence and sounds that are not usually heard in most of western music.

We are still creating a beauty that is suited to this time and place, not to the courts of Europe of the Ancien Régime. We live in America in the Twenty-first Century and work in New York City. We seek the beauty of such things as the movement of street athletes and that of crazy quilt, noisy modern cities.

We delight to hear our audiences relate to what we create. They are not all well versed in contemporary art by any means, but they are our contemporaries. They know life as we do and they relate to the beauty we create and tell us they are changed by it.

The art of dance uses movement of the human body. It is not gymnastics, which also uses the movement of the human body, because the intention of the persons using the movement is different. The gymnast strives to move perfectly to the standard. The dancer strives to move beautifully and to connect with the highest and best so that spectators may also make that connection.

Art may also intersect at some points with entertainment, though it is different from it. Entertainers strive to divert and amuse an audience. Entertainment may create fantasy that does not provide much relation to authentic human experience. It rarely challenges us to think deeply or make connections. Art may be entertaining, but it goes beyond diverting and amusing to transforming its audiences.
Decoration is another activity that may have points in common with art. The decorator seeks to make things attractive to look at by applying things to surfaces of architecture and interiors, by designing objects that may be both functional and beautiful, by enhancing the environment. The artist also creates things of beauty, but the beauty may move the viewer to a new insight or realization.

In traditional societies, all people are artists. In the West, artists have become specialized and too often marginalized. Art is essential to human culture. Art is one of the things that make human beings different from other animals.

It is intention that often makes the difference between gymnastics, entertainment, and decoration on the one hand and art on the other. We at American Creative Dance make art. We are serving an essential function of human society. We are part of what makes us a little lower than the angels but higher than the beasts. When this company is fully funded we will be free to make art for the good of all.
Tango dance and music enjoy a wide popularity throughout the world. Many movies and television programs that are not dance related show characters dancing tango, Al Pacino in *Scent of a Woman* is among the most famous, but Arnold Schwarzenegger dances tango in *True Lies*, and Dr. Green in the television series ER dances a tango in one episode. There are tango scenes in the film *Chicago*, called *The Cell Block Tango*, and in *Frida*.

Tango is a unique art form that grew collectively from the culture of the tango salons of Buenos Aires. It is not folk dance and folk music. Neither is it court dance and music. It is not like anything else.

In recent years, it has become more commercialized and influenced by Broadway show dancing and ballet. This has led perhaps to its increasing popularity, but it has also led to some changes in the nature of the medium.

American Creative Dance was drawn to tango for several reasons and now presents performances of tango dance and music of a very specific sort. Like all of our work, it is radical, in the most basic meaning of that word, rooted in the tradition.

We find affinities with tango because of 1) the nature of the movement itself, 2) the fact that the dancers in the tradition of the salon create together as they dance, and 3) the fact that tango in the salons of Buenos Aires was traditionally performed to live music.

The dance of our tango work is free from the ballet and other dance conventions that are typical of most stage tango today. It is more like the great tango exhibitions of the salons in Buenos Aires, but we use it to create a complete, unified performance. As far as we know, this is unique in the world.

We strive to perform the purest tango dance, which means what we do looks a little revolutionary given what is performed today but is actually true to the tradition. We combine the dance with the most innovative but also radical tango music.

Though this is honored rather more in the breach than not in tango performance these days, salon tango, like Van Ness Dance, is a dance of the abdomen and lower spine. The man leads his partner with the movement of his spine and torso, not with his arms, hands or feet. Though there are steps in tango dancing, the feet are not really leading, but rather the body moves from the abdomen, which move the hip joint, and the legs and feet are placed from there. The woman dancer must be flexible and allow her body to be moved from the same area. Both dancers must also be able to make a sort of "peanut butter jar" movement, where the torso is moved in one direction and the legs in the other, like twisting open a jar. This permits the dancers to be literally connected at the heart and still move the legs and feet. It is the genius of tango dance.
American Creative Dance tango also uses a collaborative composition system that began in the salons in Buenos Aires, where each of the partners is creating in performance, but the connection between the dancers is unique, as they are literally, physically connected for the entire performance. As our Tango Performance Paradigm states, the two dancers dance as one, they become a body with four legs and feet, two heads, etc., moving as one.

We also emphasize the connection of the dancers with the music.

**Tango Performance Paradigm:**

*To us, Tango is an improvisational art form where two dancers dance as one and where separation does not exist between music and dance. For dancers to collaborate directly with the musicians during the performance is the highest form of the art.*

*John Adams said of Astor Piazzolla, "For him, composing and performing were inextricably woven together. One thinks of Bach and of Ellington for models of a creative musician who saw little or no separation between improvising, composing and performing."*

*Piazzolla's ideas and works give us inspiration and encouragement.*

*Just as Piazzolla's compositions are at the intersection of western classical music and traditional tango music, our tango work is at the intersection of tradition tango dance and our own modern dance.*

We collaborated with cellist Wendy Law who played three of Piazzolla's classical works, three of his *Études* that were originally scored for flute and transcribed for cello by Law. We plan further collaborations with Law using more of the work of Piazzolla.

The company creates several tango performances a year that include original music and dance, and may include poetry or text and visual art just as all our performance does. Guest artists, especially tango musicians, sometimes join the company for these performances.

American Creative Dance is creating art of its kind with this medium and fulfilling it mission. There is a much wider audience for tango than for avant garde modern dance. Part of our mission is to bring the art of dance to the largest possible audiences. This is one way to do that. If audiences are moved and transformed by our tango dance, we rejoice. If they also find that they want to explore our other work, so much the better.
Because of the nature of the work of American Creative Dance, every rehearsal and every performance are unique. With the advent of digital recording technology, it is possible to preserve the work on CD and DVD.

These recordings serve several purposes. First, they allow persons who cannot attend a performance in the company's space in New York to hear and see this remarkable work. Millions of people all over the world can have the joy and pleasure of experiencing this art.

Secondly, the recording of rehearsals allows the entire series of solutions to the creative problems to be seen by the public. Some of the most interesting solutions are in rehearsal not in performance and would otherwise be lost.

The technology also permits the creation of a data base of recordings for use by several constituencies. Company members can benefit from seeing and hearing their own work as part of the creative process and to keep an historical perspective. Scholars and students of contemporary dance, music, and theater can also use the recordings for research and study.
THE COMPANY

The vision of American Creative Dance is to be a company of five dancers, three musicians, with stage and technical professionals such as a stage manager, lighting and set designer, costume/make-up designer, working ten months a year, paid twelve. Time off will probably be several increments of a week or two weeks at the time, amounting to about eight weeks a year. Artists need time for recreation and rejuvenation in order to function at their best.

As far as we know there is no such company in this country. Even the big ballet companies in the United States do not employ performers year round. Most dance companies that pay dancers at all do not do so for more than a few months a year. In order to qualify for unemployment, a dancer must have worked for pay for twenty-six weeks; only a very few of America’s dancers are fortunate enough to qualify for unemployment for the months they do not have income each year. Dancers who do have paying work often must supplement that with other work even during the part of the year they have income from dance because their work is so ill paid. Even the lowest paid other professionals, persons with college degrees and high levels of skill, are not ever as ill paid as dancers in this country.

We want to pay performers and artists a decent salary and provide benefits such as health insurance and at least a 401k plan.

We want to free our performers up from the strain of perpetually hunting for money to pay the rent and feed themselves and free them up to create great works of performance art. We want them to be paid like other comparable professionals, educators or researchers for example.

The company will create six to ten evenings of dance to show the public each year, giving performances in the space in our Center in runs of several weeks each.

Company members will all be accomplished professionals who have a strong desire to do the kind of work we do. The dancers will demonstrate in a rigorous audition process that they not only possess the physical skills needed but that they have the creative abilities and interpersonal skills necessary for our work. Since the actual dance work is unique, new dancers must be willing to acquire the new skills and techniques required. They must be willing to undergo a period of apprenticeship and training. Likewise new musicians must be willing to acquire the skills needed to create and perform with us and undergo a period of apprenticeship.

Our designers and others are seasoned professionals with consummate skills in their area. They enjoy the collaborative process and use their skills to achieve the kind of integrated performance the company creates.
THE CENTER

The vision of American Creative Dance is for it to have a Center in New York where it does its work.

Ideally, the Center would be in Manhattan, convenient to both the company members and the public, perhaps in the west 20’s where there are large buildings some of which are now art galleries where the work of some of the artists with whom we already have relationships is exhibited. It will be necessary to refurbish a building and suit it to our needs.

One requirement is studios and performance space with sprung floors for dance. The company needs space with mirrors for daily company class and rehearsal. The studios need to have floor space at least as large as the stage of the performance space. Commodious dressing rooms for the performers will contribute to their comfort and enable them to work more easily.

The work of this company is intimate chamber work appropriate to an ensemble of its size, so the performance space would be intimate as well, perhaps a maximum of two hundred seats. This company would never need Broadway type stage technology, but we do need the best stage lighting and of course, the sprung floors. Unlike ballet companies, we prefer good sprung wood floor not covered by Marly or other covering. We need wings and a way to go behind the stage from the wings to the other side. Dancers will need to be able to go from the dressing rooms to the wings.

Technical space will include a light booth, a properties room, places for set preparation and storage space.

A company like this requires a business manager who will need an office and space for an assistant with room for office equipment. The director and technical staff require office space on the premises as well.

Since modern technology allows us to make audio and video recordings of our priceless work for distribution to those who cannot be at performances in person and to allow for study of our work, space for the computers and equipment necessary have the wiring needed. There is also viewing space for audio and video recordings where the public and researches can use the archives we are establishing.

American Creative Dance has a growing collection of visual art created for performances. A small gallery allows the public to view these works when they are not being used in performance.

Our Center is a haven for the human spirit, the place where we create and where others can participate as spectators in the dialogue our work always strives to be with the highest and best in human nature.
AMERICAN CREATIVE DANCE

TELEVISION AND FILM

American Creative Dance is experimenting with the media of television and movies. Though we are dedicated to creating our kind of art, we know that art can and does intersect sometimes with entertainment. We also recognize that many people long for high quality entertainment. We are willing to explore this intersection and to experiment in this area.

We hired a fine script writer to create the pilot for a television series. We have shown that series to several cable channels, including HBO and Showtime. Both of those organizations let us know that they think our work would be best placed on the major networks, as it would appeal to broader audiences than theirs. We aspire to having our series on some network and need funding to be able to market it.

We also have a registered treatment for a feature length film. We would like to see this develop fully as well. Members of our organization have film experience and connections with fine film makers. Here also funds would enable us to move this project forward.

Not the least of the value of these projects is the potential for generating revenue for American Creative Dance. Currently, most of our income as a 501 c(3) not-for-profit arts organization comes from contributions from the public. We also have small amounts of revenue from ticket sales and sales of CDs. We can continue in this way indefinitely, but we can also legally generate income from our activities. Television and movies can be lucrative. We are willing to have these projects produce money to the benefit of the rest of the vision. And the projects are worthy in themselves.

Lena Gilbert on a film set