

Evaluation Report

PNB Summer Course 2011

By Jeppe Johan Hougaard Banke

1. Preparations / Expectations:

Nikolaj Hübbe, artistic director of the Royal Danish Ballet offered me the change to become an exchange student with the Pacific Northwest Ballet, and to take their summer course in Seattle this summer.

I was honored to get the opportunity to be a student at this international summer program, and I expected the summer course to be challenging in both a physical and technical way, not only in ballet but in a lot of different dance forms, that I thought we would be exposed to in the program.

Before this trip to Seattle, I had been on tour with the Royal Danish Ballet in America, one of my two major experiences in the past three months of my time in America.

I had decided to stay in America from the end of the tour to the beginning of the course, and so I stayed with some friends at their place in Boston, Massachusetts, before I went to Seattle.

2. Training / Classes / Program:

Through the four weeks of classes at PNB, I have learned a lot about the American dance style of George Balanchine. It has been very interesting to learn the difference types of movement and compare them with the style of August Bournonville that we primary dance in Denmark at the RDB. I loved the diversity of dance forms that we had in the program. We were being taught not only in different types of ballet, but also in the modern and contemporary art, character dance and the body control technique, Pilates.

The teachers at the program were very professional and gave a lot of useful corrections through the classes, based on the knowledge they had gotten through their dance careers.

The teachers were teaching very differently so it was always exciting to have new teachers and listen to them give a share of their opinion in this dance style or that specific movement.

I must admit that the program sometimes required a higher level of technique, than what I sometimes could perform. This was not a bad thing because you would always be challenged, when you went to class, but from time to time it was hard to keep up with.

The course started out just as hard as it ended, so you had to be in a good condition from the beginning of the course, to do a full class and not to get injured. I wish that they would have started out a little easier in the beginning and then raised the level through the weeks.

3. Housing:

I had, together with three other girls from RDB, rented an apartment from the corporate housing company Aboda, that we lived in through our stay in Seattle. We were very satisfied with the apartment because of the close location to the school and the area that surrounded us was very nice. Besides that we had plenty of space for all of us in the apartment, and the apartment was already equipped with all the appliances that we would need.

4. Cultural Aspects:

The cultural difference weren't as different as I had expected, perhaps this was due to, that I had stayed in America for some time before the course, and therefore I felt like I had a good insight in

the culture or perhaps I had gotten used to it. On the other hand we were not that many people from outside America, so the other student enjoyed asking us about the danish culture, the danish language, and how we would do it in Denmark, and we loved to share the cultural differences with the students, and from that we also learned more about the American culture such as how people behave in public, what you may and may not do, the differences from state to state, and how people live, move and travel through them, how the food and fashion culture look a like and how they don't, how America has a population that is so united but still a mix of people from all around the world, and therefore there is not a "typical" American.

I believe that in the American dance world there is a bit more competition when it comes to getting a job so people struggle to get forward and to be seen, we are not that many dancers in Denmark, and we definitely do not have as many ballet companies as America does, so I do not think there is quite the same "fight for the spots", if I may put it that way.

5. Exchange / Scan Design Fellowship Administration:

I am not sure whether this is a concern of the Scan|Design or it is with PNB but I must admit, that I had a lot of issues getting my Student Visa, that PNB required me to have, to take classes at their summer program. I had not received my Visa form from PNB in time, to get a meeting with the American Embassy in Copenhagen, before we had to go on the tour with RDB to America. I believe that I had informed PNB that I was going on tour with RDB and therefore needed the Visa applications some time before our departure. In the end I was issued a Visa, but in my effort to get it I had no choice but to take a plane back to Denmark and book an "emergency" meeting (which I got through our administration at RDB) with the American Embassy.

Besides all this trouble it was very nice to get to meet the members of Scan|Design at the reception that they had hosted to meet us.

6. Program / Student Type:

My opinion is that this exchange is well suited for people who want to travel and get an international perspective of the dance world and at the same time seek a challenge in their level dance technique. I would advise this future student to have all his/hers papers (Visa, flight tickets etc.) in order, to be in a good shape and prepared for any level of technique he/she may be exposed to.

7. Overall Experience:

During my stay in Seattle and a PNB I have learned a lot about, about how the dance world has its difference from country to country, company to company, and teacher to teacher. I have learned how to fend myself when living in a new country and a strange city and how to socially integrate with other people you only will be seeing for a short time, but working together with in that period.

My time in America has been an experience I will never forget, it has influenced me a lot in a very positive way, and I appreciate you at Scan|Design for making this exchange possible and for being so generous, and in general for giving opportunities like this to young dancers like me.

Sincerely,
Jeppe Banke