

# Breaking Into The Biz

By Katherine Mayfield

Katherine, the author of *Acting A to Z: The Young Person's Guide To A Stage Or Screen Career* and *Smart Actors, Foolish Choices: A Self-Help Guide To Coping With The Emotional Stresses Of The Business*, is currently working on a book with Rose Marie Wurzer, *The Dancer's Ultimate Career Guide: How to Make It In The Field Of Dance*.

## Developing Artistry

What sets a brilliant dancer apart from one who is simply competent? What is it that makes you watch one particular dancer with wonder and awe and enjoyment, even in the midst of others who also have excellent technique?

You might say that the dancer you enjoy watching has more talent than the others or that he or she is a "born performer," but at least part of the answer lies in the artistry of the dancer. Rose Marie Wurzer, a former principal dancer with Nashville Ballet, Ballet West and Cincinnati Ballet, says, "If the artistic director or choreographer you are auditioning for sees in your dancing an interest in developing and interpreting the movement—the application of artistry in your work using your technique as a means of communication—then you'll get the job." Here's how to go about developing these qualities.

### Interpretation Is Key

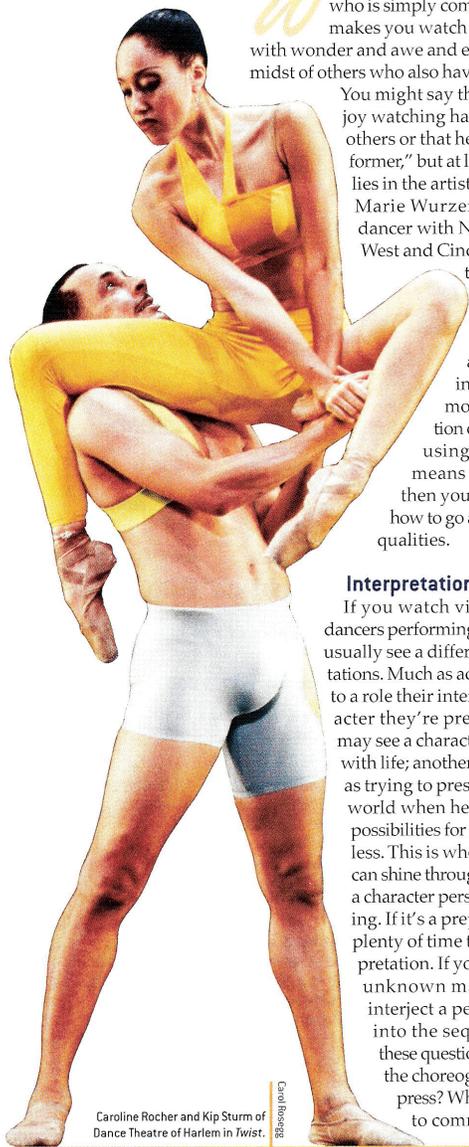
If you watch videos of well-known dancers performing the same roles, you'll usually see a difference in their interpretations. Much as actors do, dancers bring to a role their interpretation of the character they're presenting. One dancer may see a character as a woman in love with life; another dancer may view her as trying to present a brave face to the world when her heart is broken. The possibilities for interpretation are endless. This is where individual artistry can shine through: At an audition, find a character perspective for your dancing. If it's a prepared piece, you have plenty of time to work on your interpretation. If you're auditioning with unknown material, you can still interject a personal interpretation into the sequence by answering these questions: What do you think the choreographer is trying to express? What does he or she want to communicate to the audi-

ence? What does it make you feel like to dance this choreography? What kind of person might dance in this way? "The realization of how important interpretation, presentation and acting are to dancing, even in rehearsals, impressed me when principal dancers Daniela Buson and Marcello Angelini were hired at Cincinnati Ballet. When I saw them move, I realized the passion I felt for dance itself must be artistically expressed through every movement and nuance in my work," says Rose Marie. "For me, it suddenly became apparent that this was a way I could change my dancing that would benefit me. And it did." Artistry in dance, as in acting, has to do with the expression of feelings, with communication of an idea through the use of movement, rhythm, gesture and posture.

One way to begin working on your artistry is to focus inward for at least part of the time you're dancing. After all, in a performance there is no mirror in which to watch yourself—your focus is on what you are communicating to the audience rather than on your technique. In classes, you'll want to continue, at times, to check your position and movement in the mirror to continue developing your technique, but if you take your eyes off the mirror and focus on what's happening inside, you'll begin to notice feelings emerging in response to the choreography or the music. Let these feelings find expression through your dancing—through your technique—and begin to relate different steps to different feelings a character might have. For instance, consider what might cause a character to do a pirouette at a certain point in the dance. What is he or she thinking or feeling? If you're working in class, think about what the tone of the choreography expresses. Is it lightness and gentleness? Darkness? Passion? Sorrow? As you learn to connect to your feelings while you're dancing and to express them through your movements, you begin to develop your individual artistry.

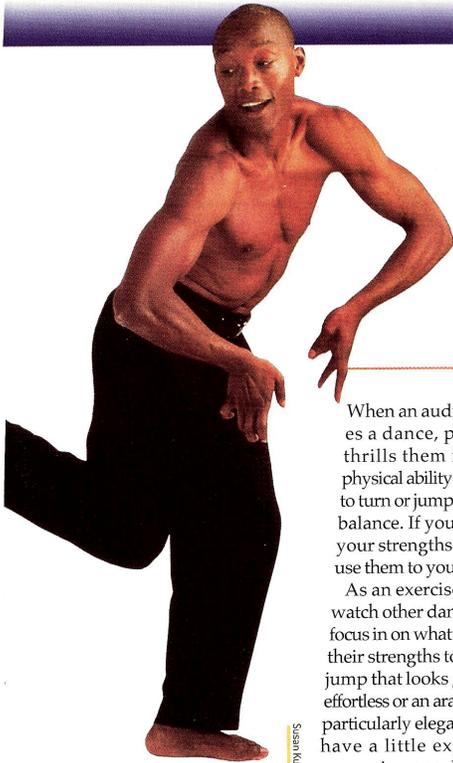
### Know Your Strengths

Another way you can work on your artistry is by developing and playing on your strengths.



Caroline Rocher and Kip Sturm of Dance Theatre of Harlem in *Twist*.

Carol Roseberg



Choreographer/dancer Bill T. Jones.

Susan Kuhlman

When an audience watches a dance, part of what thrills them is the sheer physical ability of the dancer to turn or jump, to bend and balance. If you know what your strengths are, you can use them to your advantage.

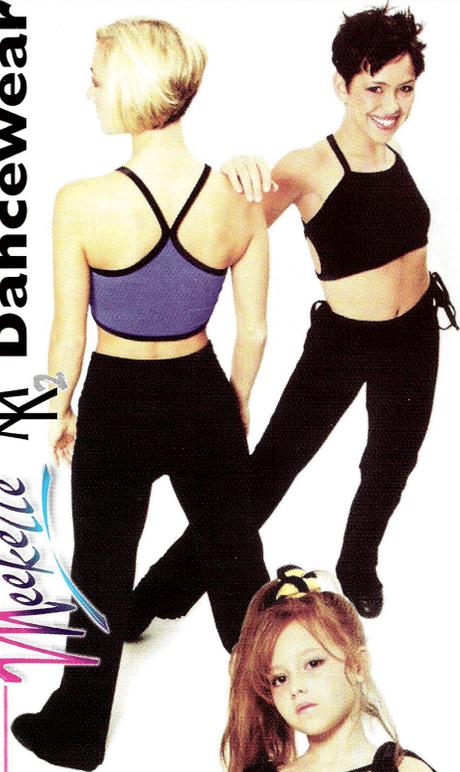
As an exercise, when you watch other dancers in class, focus in on what you perceive their strengths to be—a great jump that looks graceful and effortless or an arabesque that's particularly elegant. Once you have a little experience in comparing one dancer to another, turn your focus in on your own strengths. Are your turns balanced and rhythmic? Does your dancing reflect the mood, dynamics and emotional style of the music? It's also helpful to get some feedback from your teacher. Ask if there

are any qualities about your dancing that stand out in the teacher's mind or if he or she has noticed any potential strengths in your dancing that you might work to develop along with your general technique.

"A choreographer may see a particular strength in a dancer and hone in on it, so that the dancer is contributing to the creative process along with the choreographer. If a dancer is a really strong jumper or a really strong turner or very lyrical, then they may choreograph based on that," says Rose Marie. If you strongly present your individual style and your positive attributes, your artistry will shine through. Finally, learn to enjoy yourself when you're dancing. Though it's important to focus on technique, once you have solid training and are consistently working to better your technique, let go and enjoy the freedom to dance and perform. Go back in your mind to the first time you were enthralled with dancing, when you loved it more than anything else in the world—remember what it was that made you want to be a dancer and use that as the starting point for developing your art.

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