



Masashi Mishiro teaches at the 2009 Jazz Dance World Congress.

CENTERWORK

Alive and Kickin' Once Again

Two jazz-loving institutions join forces.

BY LAURA MOLZAHN

"Jazz was always a melting pot," says Nan Giordano, artistic director of the Jazz Dance World Congress. "It incorporates the roots and rhythms of African dance, the strong core of ballet, the freedom of modern dance, the rhythms of tap. I think that, now, jazz dance sets the pulse in other genres."

Giordano comes by her faith in jazz dance honestly. Her father, Gus Giordano, formed the troupe she now heads, Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago, in 1963. He founded JDWC—a five-day summer conference that includes student workshops, professional performances, and a choreography competition—in 1990, and made Nan Giordano artistic director. After her father's death, in March 2008, the 2009 congress was difficult for her. "I just wanted to get through it," she says. "People kept coming up to me, sobbing."

That year was the last for JDWC—until now. It's back this month, and for the first time it's happening in Pittsburgh, primarily at Point Park University in its sleek \$16 million dance complex, but also at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture. Previous congresses have been held in Japan, Germany, Mexico, and Costa Rica, as well as in JDWC's hometown, Chicago. The congress is "definitely not a money

maker," Giordano says. But several in-kind sponsorships (including from *Dance Magazine*) help JDWC break even.

This year is also the second time (the first was in 2009) that representatives from a number of colleges and universities—half a dozen this time, including University of the Arts and University of Arizona, in addition to Point Park—will attend an audition/class open only to registered congress participants. Point Park has committed \$100,000 in scholarship funds for JDWC attendees. "The university auditions and scholarships are another perk for the high school-age students," says Giordano. Though the congress is open to dancers 13 and up, with a Kids Jazz Dance program for 9- to 12-year-olds, auditions are restricted to registrants entering their senior year.

Over the years, Giordano has been impressed by the training and sophistication of the Point Park graduates she's taken into her company. Convinced that the four-year education at PPU prepares dancers for life both on and off the stage, she proposed a partnership with the university, adding school auditions and scholarships to the JDWC mix.

With college representatives attending JDWC, Giordano says, young dancers can now see "not only the industry

people, the commercial contacts, but they see that a college education is crucial. My strong feeling about this comes partly from being a parent myself. My son, who's 16, is gifted athletically, but I told him he has to get his four-year degree. The body—with dance and athletics—it's a fragile thing. Dancing is a short span in your life."

Joe McGoldrick, Point Park's director of artistic recruitment, agrees that a college education gives aspiring professional dancers a leg up. "Students gain maturity while getting a college degree," he says. "And they have the chance to learn a national repertory." McGoldrick, the point person for JDWC's auditions and scholarships, adds that about a third of Point Park's 200 dance majors are focused on jazz. "We started our program in the '70s, so we have a long history with jazz."

Among JDWC's 14 instructors this year is L.A.-based Liz Imperio, who has taught at the congress since 1999. (Past faculty members include other big names like Pattie Obey and Randy Duncan.) "It's slowly being overlooked—the power and necessity, the essence of jazz," says Imperio, whose choreography credits include tours for Madonna and Jennifer Lopez. "But with its strong lines, jazz has a direct connection to the commercial