Diversity Statement

By Gabriel Speiller

Diversity within a community leads to a beautiful collision of ideas. Differences in ethnicity, gender identity, religion, body type, socio-economic status, or philosophy benefit the group as a whole and develop introspective empathy, acceptance, and understanding.

Growing up in Queens, New York City (NYC) I was immersed in an array of cultures. Queens is the most ethnically diverse area in the world. With over 800 languages, some people would call Queens one of the most unique places on the planet. However, as someone who had never really left the city until I graduated High School, I was oblivious to the uniqueness of my upbringing. As they say, “Ignorance is bliss”. After leaving NYC, I ventured into southern states such as Florida, Texas, North Carolina, and Mississippi where I received my undergraduate degree. It was not until I left the melting pot of Queens that I realized the true beauty of diversity.

Looking back to where my love of dance developed, I can see that it was rooted in the diverse experience of my early training. When I was 17, I was fortunate to be a part of the *Young Dancemakers Company* (YDC*)*, a tuition-free improv intensive containing 18 students intentionally picked from different high schools throughout NYC. Artistic director Alice Teirstein showed us how to work together no matter our differences. I am so grateful that YDC provided a safe inclusive environment at the beginning of my dance journey.

Throughout my professional career, I experienced diversity not only through working with colleagues and choreographers from around the world but through my experiences touring nationally and internationally. As a full-time company member, I performed with *Bruce Wood Dance*, *Paul Taylor 2*, and *Ad Deum Dance Company*. While freelancing in New York City I performed with *Jessica Gaynor Dance*, *NOW Dance Project*, *Hivewild Collective*, and more. In my experience, a safe inclusive dance space is naturally created when it contains a variety of voices not just one.

As a creator, I believe it to be essential to acknowledge everyone’s story. Each person has a unique perspective on life and art that only their body can portray. I strive to look at the person they are now and challenge them to infuse their life experiences with their artistic process to become exceptional artists. As an example of my own attempts to address diversity, I have intentionally created duets with dancers of the same gender. In my work *Two of Us*, I created two duets. One with two female-identifying dancers and one with two male-identifying dancers. In addition, I have taught community classes to veterans with dementia, and refugees at the International Rescue Committee in Dallas, and at orphanages in South Korea.

Dance is a universal language. It does not matter where you are from, what religion you affiliate with, your sexual preference or identity, your socio-economic status, or if you are a differently-abled person, dance can function as an expressive medium for all persons, not just a specific group. Dance is a language all people can speak. They just need a place where they feel accepted and included. I am continually examining the privileges that I have because of my own race, gender, and sexual orientation. Consequently, I also investigate how I can use that position of privilege to open doors for those who have been stigmatized in our society. In its truest form, dance belongs to all people.