

Discover! Creative Careers: Dance Panel Q&A

Our top takeaways!

On Monday 13 November 2023 One Dance UK hosted a Careers Panel designed to provide an insight into dance careers, and an opportunity for young people to ask their burning questions! The panel of industry professionals consisted of:

- Sara Macqueen and Chris Radford – performers, teachers and co-founders of Linden Dance Company
- Alexzandra Sarmiento – director, choreographer and dancer (credits include Dance Captain for ‘Hamilton!’ London West End)
- John-William Watson – choreographer, performer and Sadler’s Wells Young Associate 2020-2022

Read some of their incredible advice and top tips for developing a career in dance!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CAREER?

“Be yourself! Really celebrate the things that make you unique ... I enjoy it the most when I feel like I can be my genuine self. Don’t try too hard to be like other people because they aren’t you!” **Alexzandra Sarmiento**

“Anyone is an artist ... my mum doodling while she’s on the phone – she’s an artist. You’re an artist whether you monetise it or not, whether you pursue it as a career or not.” **John-William Watson**

CAN YOU ATTEND A DANCE SCHOOL WITHOUT CLASSICAL TRAINING?

“Absolutely! Every dance school/conservatoire I have heard of ... they always start at the basics, at the foundations, and you build back up from there. The formal training happens at the school, rather than away from the school.” **Chris Radford**



DO YOU NEED TO BE RESILIENT TO WORK IN PERFORMING ARTS? WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR COPING WITH AUDITIONS AND THE GENERAL CHALLENGES?

“Yes, it does take a certain kind of person because it isn’t the most straight-forward path. It’s not just ‘yes, you’ve got a job and now you have security.’ So, I think even now, when I have been doing this for over a decade, I still feel that pain (when I don’t get a job) but as your experience grows, you learn to deal with those feelings a bit more efficiently. I’m not saying that it gets easier, but you learn to deal with it in a quicker fashion!” **Alexzandra Sarmiento**

WHEN WORKING AS A FREELANCE DANCER, DO YOU NEED TO HAVE A SECOND JOB TO GET BY?

“Yes and no – it can come down to practical things, for example as a dancer if there is a lack of jobs ... but it can also come down to choice. I speak to many friends who enjoy working in other roles.” **John-William Watson**

“Every time I have taken on a job I don’t see as being particularly ‘dance-related’, it’s made me a better performer. Being a waiter made me a better dancer, made me better at auditions and gave me more resilience.” **Sara Macqueen**

“My initial reaction was no, perhaps because my understanding is that a job in the arts industry is bigger than being ‘a dancer’. In my head I’ve never had a second job because when I’ve had a job that’s not been a performing job, it’s always been very arts-related such as teaching or working as a learning co-ordinator.” **Chris Radford**

IS THERE A PARTICULAR PERSON, COMPANY OR ORGANISATION THAT YOU FEEL GRATEFUL FOR, IN TERMS OF YOUR CAREER?

“My PE teacher – without her giving me a leaflet about a contemporary CAT scheme (Centre for Advanced Training) I wouldn’t have known. That’s totally what spring-boarded me into contemporary!” **Sara Macqueen**

“When I was in training, organisations seemed quite far away, even quite intimidating, but behind the email on the website is a person ready to respond to artists and tell you about what they do or offer. For the future, or for now, always reach out, always email!” **John-Williams Watson**

DO YOU WORRY ABOUT GETTING INJURED AND NOT BEING ABLE TO DANCE PROFESSIONALLY ANYMORE? WHAT WOULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

“As someone who is currently returning to performance after injury, it’s great to be open-minded and not be too fixed on ‘what will my career be.’ As you get older you may also start to be inspired by other things ... for example now I’m really interested in choreography and what other people’s bodies can do.” **Sara Macqueen**

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO ANYONE WHO SAYS THAT DANCE ISN'T A REAL OR PROPER JOB?

"You can tell them that they are incorrect! So many people have a wide, diverse range of jobs in the arts sector. There are so many options to choose from, so many different avenues! The training provides many transferable skills that will put you in a good place for any sort of career you want to take – technicians, lighting designers, producers, performers, choreographers, teachers, directors ... switch and go into media, music producers, dance videographers, physiotherapy! Just because your job isn't a 'slog' ... some jobs can be fun and arts jobs are those jobs!" **Chris Radford**

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE DANCE BUT DON'T WANT TO BE ONSTAGE?

"Find a dance organisation and look at their website – see how many roles there are. For example, One Dance UK are a dance organisation but the roles aren't related to performing. Look at a company that you admire, see what goes into production and then do a little bit of research about what those roles might be. And also, roles are being created all the time, so you might find you create your own role or work in a role that doesn't exist yet!" **Sara Macqueen**

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOUR PARENTS DON'T WANT YOU TO DANCE AS A CAREER BUT YOU ARE REALLY PASSIONATE ABOUT IT?

"Tell them not only what you want to but specifically why. Show them your passion, the companies you are interested in and the roles and careers that we have discussed today." **John-William Watson**

Visit the [One Dance UK Careers Hub](#), read our [Reasons to Study Dance at School or College resource](#) and complete the ['Where Can Dance Take Me?' resource!](#)

Thanks to our brilliant panel guests for taking the time to share their insights and expertise!

