



A reporter once asked if I was proud of a particular student who had gone on to dance professionally. I found it a strange question, and difficult to answer because it implied that I was not equally proud of my other students. I wanted to tell the reporter about all of the wonderful children I have taught over the years, and how each of them is fulfilling their potential in different fields.

Well, that wasn't the time to have that discussion, but now it is!

I'm pleased to present this issue of *Nouvelles du Ballet* highlighting a few of our former students. Whether they have chosen ballet as a career, a hobby, or as an inspiration, each has used their ballet training to achieve their goals. CU Ballet alumni are talented dancers and doctors, thespians and therapists, graduate students and working professionals.

It is a great joy in my life to see our children thrive, and I am proud of each and every one of them.

Deanna Doty
artistic director



Act Four

After the final bow, the curtain comes down amidst applause. Some moments from the performance stick with you: an amazing pas de deux, a young girl in the corps, an inspiring solo, or just an infectious smile.

For whatever reason, you sense something special in certain dancers and follow them from show to show, season to season. Eventually, casts change; new blood is brought into the ballet family, and familiar favorites decide to move on.

Where do they go? What do they do? What is their next act?

Three alumni dancers have taken the training, technique and discipline learned from their time at Champaign Urbana Ballet and Champaign Ballet Academy and turned those qualities into creative professional careers. Michelle Ziegler, Susan Heatter and Devon Teuscher took different paths, but dance is still a major influence in their lives.



Creative Therapy

Michelle Ziegler literally grew up at CU Ballet. There from the company's very beginning, she started at age 13 and worked her way through her high school and college years from the corps to her last hurrah as a Sugar Plum Fairy with an independent streak (she didn't need a cavalier!) and a job as Ballet Mistress.

"I loved starting with the company. It was this brand new thing and no one knew where it was going to go," says Ziegler, 26. "We were all there and just excited to do whatever we got to do. It's fascinating to see how far it has come in 12 years."

When Ziegler started college, she stopped dancing to focus on her studies. She quickly found she was bored with the lab work related to a biology degree and at a crossroad in her life. After taking an anatomy class, something clicked. "I thought it would be interesting to be able to fix some of the problems I had when I danced," she says. Recurring problems (shin splints, stress fractures and plantar fasciitis) had her going to physical therapy, but it was frustrating. "You'd have some guy that was a former football player trying to treat a dance injury," she recalls. "They have no idea what we do."

Ziegler took the prerequisite coursework for a physical therapy degree, but wasn't sure she was ready. Re-enter CU Ballet and Artistic Director Deanna Doty, who offered her the Ballet Mistress position which had her dancing, teaching, coaching and choreographing. Under this new partnership, Ziegler honed her analytical teaching skills by learning from Doty.

"She was always so gifted at knowing how to get the most out of each student even though everyone was so different," Ziegler says of Doty. "I think that has helped me a lot in physical therapy...knowing how to cater what I'm doing to the needs of that person and the ability to educate and to teach. Even though it's in a different way, it's still teaching movement."

Now at the end of her studies at Northwestern University (she will receive her Doctorate of Physical Therapy, DPT), she finds herself once again in the world of dance. Her clinical rotation has her working with Athletico, a Midwest therapeutic rehabilitation clinic that is the official physical therapy provider for the Joffrey Ballet. Ziegler works at the Joffrey Tower studios twice a week and dancers come

in to the Athletico office for treatment. (When we spoke, she was going to be backstage for opening night!)

Of course, she works too with non-dancers of different patient ages. "I enjoy working with the older population," she says. One of her older clients is a former dancer, so Ziegler incorporated a ballet floor barre into the therapy. That flexibility and intuitiveness she credits to CU Ballet.



Susan Heatter, a veterinarian and freelance ballerina holds a favorite patient, Nacho Papa.

Taking Her Bow(-wow)

Susan Heatter, 30, like Ziegler, took a scientific route with her life. For nine years, she danced with CU Ballet while getting her undergrad degree in Animal Sciences and her Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) at the University of Illinois. After graduating in 2007, she moved back to her hometown of Chicago where she works at Clark-N-Oak Animal Health Center, a Gold Coast animal hospital. And, she is still dancing.

"Right after I got back, I went to Ruth Page (School of Dance) and started taking adult class with Birute (Barodicaite)," she says. [Interesting side note: Ms. Barodicaite, known as "Chicago's ballet teacher," has taught pretty much everyone. If you dance in Chicago, you've taken a class from Birute. Former students include none other than Michelle Ziegler and Deanna Doty!]

She's come a long way from getting her first big part as Clara in *The Nutcracker* at CU

Ballet. "I was in shock when I got that role," she remembers. "It was my first time ever really partnering and I was so scared to do the lifts!"

Common Truths

Even in their variety of careers, these women all have two things in common. "All three were very hard workers," says Doty. The other is Doty herself. Each claims her as a positive influence and keeps in touch with her as much as their busy lives allow.

"It's really cool that I get to see them as they move through their lives," Doty says. "They learn how to teach classes, to coach...they're not learning just how to dance, but how to be a professional worker, good citizens and to give back to their community."

Sometimes people are under the impression that I want all of these kids to be dancers, but nothing could be further from the truth. I hope all of my students find happiness in what they are doing."

These three alumnae, in particular, have no complaints. When asked what they learned from Doty's tutelage, the dancers couldn't say enough.

"I was formed by her," says Ziegler. Heatter agrees. "It's impressive...the quality of the dancers coming through the company and the patience she has to actually train everyone from the beginning," she says. "She taught us that hard work and persistence will pay off in the end, whether working your way up from the corps to soloist or going for that extra turn or getting into vet school."

Ziegler adds, "Deanna was very logical and straightforward with her teaching and corrections. It just made sense."

Teuscher also looked up to Ziegler and Heatter as teachers. "I attribute almost all of my basic training to Deanna and the dancers there at the time. Had it not been for their knowledge, time, and talent, I would not be where I am today." She adds, "Deanna has always told me to just stay true to myself...to first and foremost, remember who I am. That has and always will stick with me."

- Vicki Crain

Vicki Crain is a freelance arts and culture writer in Chicago, Illinois. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Dance Magazine* and blogs at <http://rogueballerina.wordpress.com>.

Photos in this issues of *Nouvelles du Ballet* by Dan Merlo.

On the cover: Michelle Ziegler in front of the Joffrey Ballet studios in Chicago, Illinois.

Left: Devon Teuscher of ABT in her 2004 return to CU Ballet as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*.