

Dancer's 'fangirl' mashes up music, poetry and dance

AMANDA KARIOOTH THOMPSON
COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS



SHADIA MARTIN
Amanda Sieradzki

Amanda Sieradzki, who presents her thesis dance project on Saturday, comes to her calling naturally.

"I was dancing out of the womb," she quipped, "and I was on the balls of my feet all the time as a child." Her parents noticed her inclination towards music,

movement, and rhythm and Sieradzki was enrolled in ballet classes by the time she was 3 years old. By the age of 10, she was rethinking her choice.

"When you're training in ballet, those early years are very much regimented and codified. You're doing the same thing over and over again. Sometimes the whole reason you wanted to start dancing doesn't seem like it's there."

She persevered, mainly due to the fact that her mother had already paid the tuition for the month. Her studio introduced jazz and lyrical dance soon after and she enjoyed exploring these new genres while continuing to hone her ballet technique. She joined the studio's ballet company as well as a small competition team. She even landed a part in Miami City Ballet's "The Nutcracker." These accomplishments provided the motivation to keep her going through high school but when it came time to consider what she would study in college, dance wasn't at the top of Sieradzki's list.

"I had always been really encouraged towards writing and literature because those were my strengths and I had kept my dance world very separate from the world that I had at school. Dance wasn't necessarily a path that I thought I could go down in college."

Sieradzki decided to major in writing at the University of Tampa, a school with a well-respected dance minor program which she took full advantage of. Dance professor Susan Taylor Lennon became an important mentor.

"Susan really opened my eyes to different ways that dance can be incorporated into everyday life and she encouraged me to take on a lot of different kinds of leadership roles." Sieradzki worked and studied alongside Taylor Lennon in a variety of different settings, including a mental health care facility and an organization for active older adults. She also began a choreography track that allowed her to begin exploring the intersection of writing and dance.

Storytelling had always been an interest of Sieradzki's and, as a child, she had been exposed to numerous narrative ballets. She enjoyed her writing classes in college, journalism in



MEAGAN HELMAN

Sieradzki and fellow dancer Janet Cesarotti will perform the piece at The Warehouse on Saturday.

particular, but she was especially drawn to the rhythm of poetry.

"I took to writing poetic forms like the villanelle, the ghazal, and the sestina where you have a puzzle to figure out. What I didn't realize was the cross-training I was doing. In my choreography classes, I was taking all of these different pieces of movement and puzzling them together and creating formations in space."

By the time Sieradzki made this discovery, her undergraduate career was coming to a close. Unsure of her next move, she auditioned for a variety of possibilities, including the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's school. She was accepted and moved to New York City for a year's worth of training through one of the most prestigious dance programs in the country. She kept up her writing through blog posts, documenting the techniques and styles she was learning during the physically and mentally grueling daily regimen.

After completing her training with the Ailey School, Sieradzki entered the MFA program at FSU's School of Dance. Never one to shy away from a full schedule, she started teaching at the Ballet Arts Conservatory of Tallahassee, as well as teaching dance for non-majors at FSU, all while taking graduate level classes. Sieradzki's journalistic talents found a more public audience as she began writing feature articles for the Council on Culture & Arts to be published in the Tallahassee Democrat. Her writing also worked its way into her choreography.

"In that way, I had declared myself as interdisciplinary. I do these two things simultaneously and I thought I should lean more into that. It shouldn't be a divided world."

In preparation for her thesis project, she went back to some of her earliest inspirations. Sieradzki laughed as she recalled "being 5 years old, sitting in my mom's red Camaro, listening to "Paradise City" by Guns N' Roses and thinking "this woman has the most beautiful voice I've ever heard." I had no idea Axl Rose was a man until I was in middle school."

Thinking about some of her favorite song lyrics and bands, Sieradzki began forming what would become the main idea for the thesis project. "I wanted to look at how the music that influences us in our adolescence shapes who we become."

From that initial idea, she worked collaboratively with her cohort using writing prompts to develop "fangirl & the liner notes." This interdisciplinary dance performance interweaves music, dance, and poetry and examines some of the personal and societal contra-



If you go

What: "fangirl & the liner notes," an interdisciplinary dance performance

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 18

Where: The Warehouse, 706 W Gaines St.

Cost: free

Contact: La Toya Davis-Craig at 850-644-2449

or ldavis3@fsu.edu; <https://www.facebook.com/events/390454184622089/?ti=icl>

dictions and expectations we all face. Sieradzki and fellow dancer Janet Cesarotti will perform the piece at The Warehouse.

"It seemed natural to do it in a music venue, to simulate some of the rock and roll concerts I had grown up going to. The movement I'm using, the vernacular I'm using doesn't belong in a proscenium theater. It's an of the people, for the people kind of thing. Dance shouldn't be something for the select few."

Sieradzki has spent a significant portion of her graduate studies focused on "fangirl & the liner notes" and, though she's proud of the work, she's looking forward to future accomplishments. "This is not my opus, this is just the beginning. I want to continue playing with these strategies of dance and writing. I want to continue making work that's accessible to communities, that gets people together, and that's fun."

Amanda Kariooth Thompson is the Education and Exhibitions Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

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