

# Peek into the past with theater's choreographer

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Idy Codington aspires to forever be a student of the arts, whether it's in the back of a classroom or dance studio, exercising her mind and executing combinations until her bones beg for a rest. Dance keeps her grounded, and even as she nears 61, she couldn't imagine her world without it.

Codington is continuously on the move — studying beginning Spanish classes and ballet at Florida State University, swing dancing on Tuesday nights, and acting as assistant director and choreographer for Tallahassee's Theater with a Mission.

The latter is where she has devoted most of her time in town, putting in over 500 volunteer hours a year since joining the troupe in 2012 and winning the U.S. President's Volunteer Service award annually. The theater specializes in Spanish Golden Age plays, and Codington delights in working for an organization that blends her love of education, history, and movement. When asked to learn a dance from the past, like the Spanish seguidilla, she finds research to piece together steps to teach to the actors.

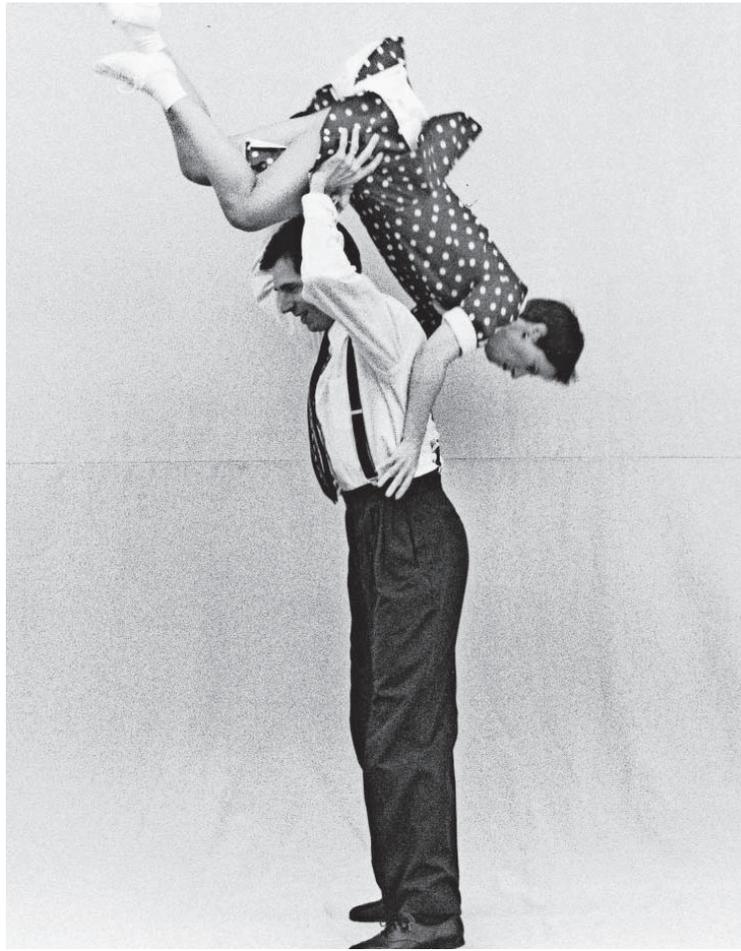
"I look at a lot of footage of folk dance troupes, but I have to remember that these are from the 2000s," explains Codington. "Steps change over the years because no dance is static, and nobody wrote down folk dances or what they did in Spain. These days I'm just trying to resurrect, because dances get lost and everything mutates."

Giving history legs is a talent of Codington's, whose own personal dance background is peppered with all styles and eras. Graduating high school early, she jetsetted to NYC where she studied at the Joffrey Academy of Dance and landed a job with the Ohio Ballet. She recalls her most memorable performance with the company at the Fox Theater in Atlanta, where they were ushered inside and welcomed with red roses at every dressing room mirror.

Though an injury sent her back home to Brookline, Massachusetts, Codington didn't stay down for long. She earned her BA in Dance at Smith College and was awarded a scholarship to Vienna where she taught the Charleston and Viennese waltz to students for five weeks.

Upon returning, Codington opened her own dance studio. It wasn't long before swing dance instructor Bob Thomas became her other half as they toured the U.S. and Asia as the Kamikaze Jitterbugs with the Commonwealth Vintage Dancers, led by Patri Pugliese.

"It's really wonderful when teachers are passionate about what they teach because then it's such a pleasure to learn," recalls Codington of Pugliese's influence. "He was a stickler for getting it right and we were well dressed from the skin out with great technique. Nineteenth century dance is full of fabulous jumping combinations like the



Choreographer Idy Codington works out a complicated dance routine.

IDY CODINGTON

zigarella and it's just a treat to do."

Though the Kamikaze Jitterbugs specialized in 1930-60s dance, Codington found a deep connection to older dance forms like baroque or folk dances from the early 19th century. Unlike the preconceived notions of historical movement, there's nothing stiff or stuffy about it.

Codington, a friend of the late New York Times photographer, Bill Cunningham, smiles as she remembers his energetic spirit capturing herself and the vintage dancers, and how he said they could make any venue "come alive."

She describes how these social dances come with their own set of rules, and once learned you can follow or lead just about anything. Her advice to newcomers is to relax, smile, and just have a good time.

She has trouble naming her favorite type of dance, whether it's in a singular form like ballet or the Charleston or dances performed with a partner. Co-

ditiongton's attitude towards both teaching and learning dance remains to have as much fun as possible and let the music take over.

"Music attaches somewhere deep inside you, like it has tendrils to make your insides dance," says Codington. "The lindy hop is just a joy, and the mazurka presents this kind of power between you and your partner. Then there's the waltz where you and another person are swirling together in your own world."

Aside from learning movement, she enjoys reading about the eras that surrounded these dances, trying out the attire, foods, and other social graces. Codington earned an MA in American Dance Studies from FSU, and admits that once she really studies a dance she instantly falls head over heels. From there it's a tidal wave taking that new knowledge, moving with it, and in turn, becoming imbued with passion, wanting to teach others.

Theater with a Mission has become

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Idy Codington, center, performs during a Three Kings Celebration with actors from Theater With A Mission.

the ideal outlet for Codington, who indulges in every new play and its accompanying research in order to choreograph, act, or organize. The troupe often gives free performances, traveling to St. Augustine's Mission of Nombre de Dios, the Carrabelle Lighthouse festival, and Mission San Luis. Aside from choreographing, she's transformed into a bride in "El Retablo de las Maravillas" and a king in one of the first "Three Kings" plays from the 10th century.

"I try to keep everything going," says Codington. "If there's somebody who doesn't show up I will know their part or learn their part, but I'm mostly behind the scenes until I'm needed."

Their latest project at Mission San Luis, "Loco for Love," takes the same story from Shakespeare's last, lost play and Cervantes' own version of the same work, to tell a tale of love, loss, and jealousy from different cultural perspectives. To add to the excitement, Codington says it will be presented in the style of a WWE smack-down for storytellers where referees will cajole the audience to vote on a winner.

Before and after the performances on Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 2, there will be demonstrations and lectures from leading scholars including topics such as 17th century Spanish sword-play, an analysis of strong women characters in works of theater, and a look at Moorish influences in the Spanish theater. Codington is eager once more to peek into the past through a rollicking mix of language, movement, and laughter.

"Theater with a Mission does plays no one has ever seen in English, and many haven't been performed in Spanish in the last 400 years," declares Codington. "These plays are so good because you could find these characters now. I think attendees will gain a knowledge of who Cervantes was, hear beautiful language, and have a fantastic time."