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“Dancing the Way You Are” Manatsu Tanaka, a Dancer in New York



Bio



田中 真夏 | Manatsu Tanaka

Being a company member of Yamato Kids Musical of The Big Dream Play Theater Company, she has been starring for 8 productions out of 14 during the time she has been there, receiving good reviews. From 2015 to 2019, she has worked with various choreographers, resulting in dancing in 15 pieces during her time in college. Prominent works she has danced include; Paul Taylor Dance Company, Jon Lehrer Dance Company, Bliss Kohlmyer, and Jason

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Olsenberg. In 2017, she receives her first IMDb credit by appearing in the short film “CHOICES” as the lead. Getting her intensive training at Steps on Broadway during the summer of 2018, she also had the opportunity to lead in Mona Haydar’s single release music video, “Lifted”, and has been published on media. Exploring her artistry at the Sidra Bell MODULE 18 Summer Program, she is also dancing in the production of “Venus and Adonis” produced by Brooklyn Opera Works.

Change of perspectives after studying abroad.



-Please tell us who you are and what you are working on right now?

I am a senior at SUNY Fredonia, and getting ready to get my BFA Dance Major and Theater Arts Minor degree. During the academic terms, not only I have dance rehearsals and performances, I also have choreography projects, plays, sometimes even as a stage manager and an assistant director. We have 3 months for summer break, and this year, I chose to do the Steps on Broadway Summer program in Manhattan, and the Sidra Bell Dance New York’s intensive, MODULE 18. In the meantime, I also had the privilege to be a part of couple music videos for Artists such as Mona Haydar, The Next Greatest American Novel, Santiago Music, Taragano Theater, and Melody English, and do photoshoots, and this year, I am a part of Brooklyn Opera Works’ summer production, “Venus and Adonis”

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-Even as a student, you have done so many projects! Were you into dance since you were little?

I have been a company member of Yamato Kids Musical by the Big Dream Play Theater Company, and had the luxury to be on stage every year, however, I haven't had any formal classical training in dance. However, despite to the background I had, the choreographer I had that time saw potential and trust in me, saying that "You have a good understanding of your movements. You are someone that you learn and grow well", and kindly offered me many "Dancer" roles. That is definitely where my love and interest to dance has come from, and simply wanted to be better at it; to commit to it. I literally watched and learned and applied it to my body, so that I won't be compared to the peers who have been dancing for their whole life. But eventually I was very committed to this art form, and made a decision to pursue this art form as my college education. To be honest, the struggle of my own embarrassment to start formal dance training at the age of 18, which is VERY late for a dancer, and the feeling that I have in my gut that I AM committed to this, and it is MY body MY movement is still a friction I have within me, and learning how to embrace it.

-And then you have decided to go to college in NY state?

When we talk about dance styles and culture, there is a major differences in the West Coast and the East Coast. In general, the West Coast is more of the Street, Urban, and Hip Hop styles and thrives in commercial styles, and the East Coast is the center of Broadway, Classical Jazz, Ballet, and especially contemporary, and it was more in alignment with my interest of studies, and so I started my research for colleges in the East Coast, and reached to SUNY schools. Every time on breaks, I went to Manhattan, and was lucky enough to work and go to auditions where there were plenty of professional dancers, and the as I went to tens and hundreds of those auditions, I started to book gigs!

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-What was your first impression when you came to the United States?



I always felt that in Japan, there is a culture of if you don't look like what everyone else looks like, you are seen as the "outcast", but in the United States, everyone has different hair styles, fashion, body types and height, and it was so diverse to me, and I felt a relief that I can be myself here. When I was a teenager, I used to gather information about beauty and weight loss from magazines, and there was a chart that showed the weight you "should" be corresponding to the height. That has encouraged me to go too far, and I got anorexic and did not take care of myself at all. To reflect on that right now, I see how I was suffocating myself in a statement that was not real at all, and moreover, I was not ALIVE at all! As I went abroad and made so many friends that came from different backgrounds, and committing to the dance program I had the privilege to go to allowed me to have a wider vision, a different perspective, mostly inspired from different people from different communities. Not to mention that to educate myself and the environment that I met through the LGBTQ community has changed me a lot. LGBTQ topics are still a taboo in Japan, and by being immersed into LGBTQ communities has given me a relief

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that every single person has a different life different story, and turned into a motivation for myself to leave the idea that I had to “follow” the right thing.

-I guess The Unites States is about individuality. So it was a turning point to reflect on your life?

Of course the dance world is not easy at all, and even though that we are a very supportive community, there are times that competition, jealousy and comparing overtakes the supports. I have thought to myself over and over during the four years in college; “What do I have to change about myself? My dancing? My technique? Or is it my body composition, or facial structure, or my hair? What is it about me that is lacking and how should I fix that?” And I hit the bottom of my self-esteem. But I have really learned that it is how you accept that raw emotions and the vulnerability of yourself, and came to a realization that we are all very different individual human beings, there is no reason to compare each other, for there is nothing to compare. This was an idea that I never thought of having it in myself 6 years ago. Since Instagram and social media has been a huge platform for dancers to show off their technique, turns and high legs, and the trend right now is for young dancers to feel the pressure that as a dancer they have to have tricks, they have to have something to be impressive enough when they post on social media. But I personally think that rather than the dance to show off the tricks and impressions, the dance that is very unique to one’s body, not much of tricks or it’s not the impressive movements but a dance that one’s eye cannot be taken off of, and to provoke a thought in that person who saw the dance; I want to pursue that kind of dance in my movement, in my artistry. I want to dance in the way that is true and vulnerable to my body.

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-Interesting! So it seems like you started to notice the way you want to dance after realizing that there is no way and no need to compare with others. What is something that is important for you that you realized after you came to the United States?



When I was in High School, I was in the midst of the frustration of “What does it mean to be myself?”, “When will my “self” would be established?” and I lost self-confidence and esteem, and was very afraid that I had no idea what the future would be like for myself. The most impactful change of perspective I had after studying abroad in the United States was the positivity and the optimistic way of accepting myself. The core of one’s identity starts with accepting, embracing everything of their self, and it almost feels like you build it up from there. Accepting and embracing yourself doesn’t have to mean to like it in a positive way. But when you are able to accept all parts, including the positive and the negative, and sometimes the darkest parts of one’s self could turn in to the strongest suit of their self, and I found a pass way to apply it in to my choreography, and I realized that I was able to create a space for myself instead of looking for where do I fit. As a performer, I want to be an artist that will provoke thoughts to the audiences, even if there are only few of them, rather than an entertainer that is accepted in the commercial industry by major audiences. In other words, I definitely think there is more worth to it by

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committing and pursuing the artistry that is true and vulnerable to myself even if it is for smaller audience member.

-There is certainly a dilemma of the desire to be accepted and to commit to what is true to you. You mentioned that you want to pursue the movement that is true to you but what is your vision in terms of how you want to face the art form of Dance?

In a general, big picture vision, I want to work as a dancer for companies and shows. And if I can be an inspiration to someone to feel positive or to change perspectives because they saw my ways of expressing, that will be fantastic. No matter how many auditions I will go, I know that I will never give up. My goals right now is to be a company dancer. And to get my Artist Visa (O-1 B Visa) and to legally work in the United States as an Artist.

-Can you tell us your favorite word/quote?

"No Day but Today "

Regardless of if that day was a good day or a bad day, the layers of every single day is going to be the foundation of who you are today, so why not accept the positive and the negative, to embrace all those elements as a tool to express, to move forward, to LIVE everyday, is my motto.

-Thank you very much! We wish you the best for your career as a Dancer!

▼ Music Video that Manatsu Tanaka has been featured in;

mona haydar

11 million subscribers

Mona Haydar - Lifted

▼ Check out Manatsu Tanaka's daily life!

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