Best of Both Worlds

Unsure of whether to pursue a college dance degree or a postgraduate training program? By Jessica Giles

For years, young dancers fresh out of high school who wanted to continue their training were faced with a choice: join a trainee program or enroll as a dance major at a four-year university. Nowadays, the options are vast, ranging from one-year postgraduate training programs and second company positions to unique partnerships between lauded dance academies and colleges. As attitudes around dancers going to college have shifted, aspiring professionals now have a host of paths to choose from.

What Are My Options?

Postgraduate training programs are available from one-year independent study at a renowned dance school. Since these opportunities come

I’m Torn. How Do I Pick?

1. Write down your goals. Having a clear idea of your professional aspirations will help you hone in on an opportunity that fits you best. If you don’t know what your heart set on is, talk to a career counselor or a dance teacher.

2. Attend a summer intensive. Take advantage of summer programs offered at both universities and dance schools. These can function as a trial run to get you accustomed to what a school can offer.

3. Think long-term. A dancer’s career doesn’t last forever. If you don’t pursue a college degree now, will you go back to school in the future? Make a game plan for how you’ll transition when your professional career comes to a close.

Check Your Readiness

Even if you already know you’d like to pursue a career in dance, you all have a high level of training and the rigor of a college academic schedule. “In some ways, I think the students who apply to this program must be motivated in more than one way,” says Melanie Person, director of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program. “They don’t have a typical view of life.”

Four-year university dance program: Whether you’d like a liberal arts education or the resources of an esteemed research university, a college program allows you to earn your bachelor’s degree while specializing in anything from commercial dance to pedagogy.

Who is it for? The postsecondary dancer who is searching for more technical training, performance opportunities and emotional growth before embarking on a professional career (but isn’t looking for a college degree just yet). These can serve as the ideal transition from student to professional, says Margaret Tracey, director of Boston Ballet School.

Joint BFA programs: Collaborations between ballet companies or dance schools and universities have cropped up all over the country. From the partnership between Richmond Ballet and Virginia Commonwealth University to the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program, these options blend rigorous training with the chance to earn a college degree and build connections at a company.

Who is it for? The disciplined student who is capable of undertaking the highest caliber of dance training and the rigors of a college academic schedule. “In some ways, I think the students who apply to this program must be motivated in more than one way,” says Melanie Person, director of the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program. “They don’t have a typical view of life.”