



PHOTO: AMANDA BILLING

CHLOE KLEIN (FAR RIGHT) AND THE TEMPO FESTIVAL TEAM, 2017

This article was originally posed to me as a question I could never hope to address in 850 words: is tertiary dance education training students in such a way that meets the needs of the industry? The relationship between tertiary dance educators, and 'the real world' or 'the industry', and the successful or otherwise transition of students between these spaces (more accurately represented as a complex, overlapping Venn diagram than two separate spaces) has been a conversation I've had numerous times in the past few years as I have myself been on this journey alongside my peers.

BY CHLOE KLEIN

It's an important question, and one infinitely more complex than yes or no. I can't speak for the experience of every student, or New Zealand tertiary dance institution, or for the industry (which is only increasingly diversifying), of which the technical skills, knowledge requirements, and perceptions of success, are not universal. Who is the industry? Who defines its needs? As graduates, aren't we also the industry? I can only reflect on my own experience of this transition, and on what aspects of my tertiary training prepared me to traverse the winding path of my professional creative practice.

I completed a Bachelor of Dance Studies (Hons) in 2015, and a Master of Dance Studies in 2018 at the University of Auckland. Throughout this time, I have concurrently worked as a freelance producer of contemporary dance for Tempo Dance Festival and several independent seasons, as well as a writer, along

with a stint as an office administrator. There are plenty of things I felt insecure and ill-prepared for fresh out of university, and there was a lot of knowledge I had to learn on the job - there still is!

How do I keep on top of my taxes with contract work? What are the benefits of being GST registered? How do governance and management structures in dance companies actually work? What do venues/festivals/independent artists expect of me? Should I be a sole trader? How can I relate to and communicate with funding bodies? How much should I be charging for my services to different types of clients? How should I market myself as a brand? How do I manage the hills and valleys of irregular cash flow? I could go on.

Since stepping out of the structure, resources, and short-term certainty of what I'll be doing next week provided by my tertiary training, I have experienced vastly different circumstances and projects that have

raised their own new questions and challenges. My journey has been different again from others that graduated in my year. Each of these situations has required of me, and taught me, different things. Each time I have been in a position of unknown, even as I slowly accumulate experience. It was during my tertiary training that I learned it's okay to be in that position. Vulnerable and uncertain of the unknown. I was able to grow through those experiences by falling back on the key skills and competencies I learned at university: versatility, resilience, collaborative thinking and action, critical thinking, and proactive learning.

Tertiary dance institutions are now training the educators, performers, choreographers, business owners, innovators, administrators, policy makers, activists, and collaborators for a world, and a country that is rapidly changing. Many current students will become part of our existing industry structures, maintaining and improving them. Some will go onto develop new structures, communities, ways of practising and thinking about industry in response to our gaps and this changing world. Most will be constantly moving between these spheres in their practice. What specialised knowledge our students are trained in will always be up for debate in the future as we strive to predict the needs and challenges that we haven't faced yet. I believe our pedagogical practices and curriculum (explicit and hidden) should rightly be rigorously reviewed. Regularly. Rather than 'what',

the training that has prepared me most effectively for working in this industry has been a training of 'who'. Who are the people that will successfully navigate and shape this shifting world?

Creative problem solvers; generous innovators; respectful, relationally competent human beings; resilient carers; communicators; and compassionate advocates who recognise and are comfortable within the essential value of collaboration. Articulate thinkers, movers, questioners, teachers, connectors and planners who are flexible to change. It's these competencies and values that have served me and others most in the transition between education and industry, and that I recognise in my peers who are out there championing positive contribution to dance in their studios, communities, schools, dance companies, business ventures, and artistic practice.

I'M CONFIDENT THERE REMAIN MANY VARIED ADVENTURES AHEAD OF ME IN MY CONTRIBUTION TO 'THE INDUSTRY' AND AS A HUMAN THAT WILL STUMP ME IN A MYRIAD OF NEW WAYS. REMEMBERING MY TRAINING, AND EQUIPPED WITH CURIOSITY, COLLABORATION, AND CRITICAL THINKING, I'M CONFIDENT I'M GOING TO FIGURE IT OUT. ■



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