

DANCE

AUSTRALIA

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Tamara Rojo,
Carlos Acosta,
Stephen McRae
Guest stars in
**'Romeo
& Juliet'**

INSPIRING!

The Youth
America
Grand Prix

WELL JUDGED:
SYTYCD's
Aaron Cash



*"I adored the
partnership I
had with Robert
Curran..."*

— Lucinda Dunn, p. 50



AUDITION SPECIAL

Navigating the
European dance
company trail

My memorable
audition

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Auditions can be the most important event in a dancer's career: the doorway to a new job, a new country, a new life. Below, dancers share their most memorable auditions with us.

MY MEMORABLE AUDITION



Widdison-Jacobs
as Juliet in the
WA Ballet's
'Radio and Juliet'.

Brooke Widdison-Jacobs

Principal Dancer
West Australian Ballet

I had been dancing in Europe for a few years when my travels took me to London to audition for the English National Ballet. As I stood amid the chaos of London commuters on the Piccadilly Line tube, I noticed sitting across from me another dancer, easily recognisable as he sat massaging his calf muscles! I quickly discovered that he was with the Royal Ballet of Flanders in Antwerp, Belgium. The company just happened to be performing at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London.

It seemed meant to be, so the next day I found myself outside Sadler's Wells waiting to join company class. As I had not contacted the company to pre-arrange my audition, the only way to get past security was to be smuggled into class between two racks of costumes. No easy task, but with a bit of distraction from the dancer I had met on the tube and the good fortune of incredibly large costumes, I successfully slipped right past all security checks and into what was already becoming my most memorable audition.

What struck me as unusual about this company was the friendliness of the dancers and their immediate willingness to help me, a rare thing in the competitive world of ballet in Europe. The dancers even cleared a place for me to stand at the barre! Almost unheard of!

The class went well and I had the added luck that the director was teaching. After the class the director asked if I was looking for a job, offering me immediately a contract. Everything seemed to just fall into place!

I began at Royal Ballet of Flanders four months later and spent a very happy five years of my life in such a great company and a city that now 10 years later still feels like my second home. Oh... and that dancer I met on the London tube? He became my wonderful husband a few years later!

“A cast is about team work, and that's what a creative team want – a team player.”

Samuel Pereira

Slovak National Theatre Ballet in Bratislava, Slovakia

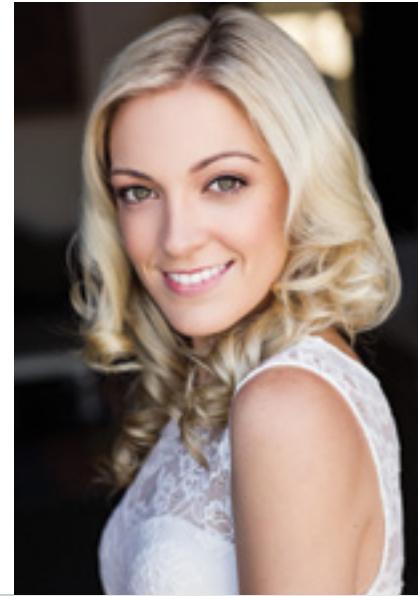
I had just finished an audition in Madrid and had an audition in Vienna the next day. So after the audition I rushed to the airport. There I waited eight hours because of a delayed flight. I eventually had to stay the night in a hotel in Madrid. I rescheduled a flight at six in the morning but had to stop over in Amsterdam. I got into Vienna airport with two hours to spare before my audition started. I waited for my baggage on the carousel for about 30 minutes. Eventually the carousel stopped and my luggage was nowhere to be seen.

I rushed to the lost luggage desk and they informed me that they couldn't trace it. So I gave them all my details and caught a taxi straight to the audition.

I rushed in and informed them that I couldn't take the audition because I had lost all my luggage. They told me to wait and sign up and they'd see what they could do. Out of the audition room came a principal dancer who happened to be on the panel. The staff informed me that he could lend me clothes. So I had to do the audition in his unitard, support and ballet shoes two sizes to small. I was cut after barre. Never was I so happy to get cut and go back to my hotel and laugh/cry and sleep.

A month later I auditioned for Gauthier Dance Company in Stuttgart. I ended up partnered with a girl for the repertoire round who managed to land on my toe. The blood rushed out of my face and I looked down to see my toe had completely changed shape. I couldn't even walk. The audition was put on hold while everyone was rushing around taking care of me. Eventually they decided I had to go to hospital but there was no one to take me so I went in an ambulance. Two hospitals, two doctors, one osteopath, two x-rays and one ultrasound later they figured out I had ruptured a joint capsule in my toe and needed to take two to six weeks off.

Samuel is a graduate of the Australian Ballet School and 2014 Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship winner. He is now in the corps of the SNTB.



Gretel Scarlett

WAAPA graduate Gretel is currently playing Sandy in 'Grease'

“It's extremely ironic, but my first professional audition was for *Grease*: the Arena Spectacular. I find it very interesting to reflect on what it felt like to be the youngest and most inexperienced in the room. It was one of the most intimidating and scariest experiences of my life. I was a part of an open dance call and even though I was confident as a dancer, this audition completely altered my perspective. I was terrible, it was terrible, there was a lot of people who 'knew' people and they were showing off and trying out the intimidation factor, and it was completely working on me.

But it taught me a lot, and one thing was that I was never going to be 'that' girl in an audition. If a young girl is struggling to pick up choreography, I will now be the one to help her out. A cast is about team work, and that's what a creative team want – a team player. Funnily enough, when it came to my *Grease* audition last year, I wasn't auditioning for Sandy. I put myself up for a pink lady. So I had to dance my butt off with the rest of the girls. There were so many young girls there whose first audition it was. I stood back and let the younger ones get to the front. They were nervous and some struggling and when they were unsure, I did my best to help. It doesn't matter who you know in an audition, you are the same as everybody else. I learnt a lot from that first *Grease* audition, and I believe the karma of kindness goes a long way.”

Juliette Verne Blaikie

Director, Urban Dance Centre
and J-Foxx Entertainment

I was living in New York and my Thursday morning ritual was wake up, buy the *Backstage* newspaper (that was filled front to back with auditions), grab a coffee and a bagel and sit in Central Park circling the auditions. One morning the first thing that jumped out was an audition to be a Rockette at Radio City Music Hall, New York, New York. I circled it 20 times and locked that date in quick smart!

Audition day arrived and I made my way to Radio City Music Hall – the line was out the door, twisting its way around the block. There is a height requirement to be a Rockette, and they measured me to see if I was tall enough before being allowed to enter the building. I'm 5'8" and just scraped in.

It was so exciting I could hardly contain myself. Being backstage, seeing all the iconic costumes, the celebrity photos and walking into the longest dance studio I'd ever seen, I decided this was one gig I definitely wanted.

Round 1: Dancers were taken into the studio in groups of fifty, taught a strong, stylised jazz routine that was very line specific. It was intense – the panel was looking for strong, elegant, style-specific dancers that could kick their legs high and stay in clean formations. They broke the groups down into six, watched each group, then made the first cut.

Round 2: We had to execute the famous Radio City Music Hall Rockette kick-line. A challenging experience as the panel was incredibly specific on lines and precision. Then... they cut again.

Round 3: A fast, classic tap routine. Luckily I grew up with a Vaudevillian, brilliant tapper Dad, which got me through to the next and final round.



Round 4: "To the wardrobe department!" Here the seamstresses took measurements, everything from head to toe and height again. Then onto another room where we were weighed and even had our body fat measured!

It was one of my favourite and most exciting audition experiences and I was absolutely fascinated by how thorough the process was.

Then the day was over. I was told "Don't call us, we'll call you." and someone would be in contact.. soon..

The next week, a phone call with a very polite voice on the other side asking if I would be interested in being "a Radio City Music Hall Rockette". "Would I?!!.. Absolutely!"

Juliette was a Rockette for one year. She is also a featured choreographer on 'So You Think You Can Dance'.



PHOTO: JUDITH SCHLOSSER

Donna-Mae Burrows

Ballet Zurich, Switzerland.

I was born and raised in Australia but am currently a junior member with Ballet Zurich. Auditioning for this company was my first. It was when Christian Spuck was first taking over the directorship of the company, so there were many eager dancers and a lot of nerves and excitement surrounding the whole prospect of the new potential opportunities!

I remember walking into the studio for the first time, seeing so many tall beautiful girls; I tried not to get distracted by them or be so nervous, as I really didn't think I had any chance. The minimum height asked on the application was 169cm, so I knew the odds were against me as as I'm only 161cm. I decided to just try and enjoy the day and be me. Being my first audition, I wanted to learn as much as I could from the experience. Funnily enough, height didn't matter in the end, and I was offered a contract that very day!

A week or so later my friends were at another audition and overheard some girls gossiping about the jobs and contracts of the audition season so far. One of them said: "yeah, and supposedly Zurich hired a midget". My friends said they had to smile and laugh to one another – "Oh my God, that midget is definitely Donna!"

Burrows (with Michael Burton) in 'Iris', performed by the Zurich Ballet.

Vanessa Shield

Soloist, Leipzig Ballet, Germany

I am from Newcastle and have been working with the Leipzig Ballet for four seasons. I did the open audition when I was still part of Ballet Dortmund (also in Germany) in December, 2010, which is at the very beginning of the audition season. I did the audition because I knew there was going to be a change of director and therefore a lot of jobs, and it also has a good reputation in Germany.

To get to Leipzig in time for the audition was the hard part: I had a performance in Dortmund on the Saturday night and the audition for Leipzig was on Sunday morning. The only way to get there was to take three trains throughout the night. I managed to arrive in time (I was number 94, so one of the last) but without any sleep. The audition went for eight hours and without any breaks. The only way I got through it was adrenaline. He was obviously interested in endurance so I pushed myself to my limit. After the audition I got back on another night train so I would arrive in time for class at 10am.

A week later a message was left on my voice mail saying that they gave me the contract!



Jacinta Murphy

Dance teacher

In 2007, I made the decision that I wanted dance full time. After researching the available courses I decided to audition for the Victorian College of the Arts, Bachelor of Dance.

The first part of the audition was a ballet class which I felt confident with as I had extensive ballet training under Dianne Parrington.

After this came a contemporary class with which I had no formal experience, so I was quite nervous. The exercises felt very foreign but I just tried to use all the visual and verbal prompts the teacher provided to help me keep up.

Then came an improvisation session where very minimalistic music was played and we had the chance to experiment with movement. I felt quite self-conscious; however I just focused on what I was doing rather than those around me.

Finally we had a discussion about the potential that dance held as a career; that performing was one avenue but then so was choreography, dance education, dance research, etc. This was something very unique to this audition.

It's now 2014 and I am a registered Royal Academy of Dance Ballet teacher, RAD Vic Panel Member and the coordinator of a successful VCE Dance program. I teach 30 hours and over 200 male and female students a week and I love my job!

Auditioning for VCA was an intimidating experience in many ways but it broadened my perception of dance. It was the first time I really became aware of the different avenues that were available aside from performing itself. The staff I encountered on that day also struck me as so passionate about educating and inspiring the next generation. That is something that has resonated with me and influenced my decision to teach others.



Shield performing in 'Mozart Requiem', choreographed by company director Mario Schroeder.

PHOTO: IDAZENNA



OPPOSITE PAGE: The top 20 (each line from left) Top : Nadiah, Thabang, Eden, Jay, Sally; Line 2: Joel, Zoey, Michael, Kathaleen, Jordan; Line 3: Renelle, Chris, Yukino, Blond, Ashleigh; Bottom: Sam, Maddie, Patric, Lauren, Stephen.

Cash analysis

Aaron who? When he appeared as a judge on 'So You Think You Can Dance', many were introduced to this talented Australian for the first time. Yet the talented Cash has paved the way for many Australians overseas, writes Sally Clark.

WHEN Aaron Cash was first announced as a judge on Series 4 of *So You Think You Can Dance Australia*, many younger members of the Australian dance scene, both students and teachers, scratched their heads and questioned his dance heritage and right to occupy that role in this new Australian series. Cash had trained in Australia, and was a multi-skilled and classically trained dancer, singer and actor. But the bulk of his 25 year professional career had been spent in the United States. Although he has worked with icons like Baryshnikov, Twyla Tharp and Cher, and more recently as co-choreographer of Cuba's "Ballet Revolucion", he has flown under the radar in Australia.

Fortunately, bringing him to the attention of SYTYCD's audience has remedied that oversight and also means he can share the wealth of knowledge he has gleaned from all those incredible performance experiences. His career serves as a great example of how rewarding and varied your professional opportunities can be when you are not afraid to challenge yourself or move yourself to where those challenges are available.

Cash began his dance training in Brisbane with Clarrissa Hill before winning a scholarship to study at [the late] Ross Coleman's performing arts school, which moved him to Sydney and shaped the kind of dancer he would become. Of that experience Cash says: "Ross Coleman was probably the greatest influence in my life, and I miss him every day. What George Balanchine did for American Ballet, Ross Coleman did for dance in this country. It wasn't just about the dance, it was about life. And life is to be lived – and you danced as you lived with great passion and hunger and curiosity. You always learned. You never stopped learning."

Cash notes other Australian choreographers and dancers as inspirations who also fuelled his passion for the craft. "My influences were always people like Graeme Murphy, David Atkins, Paul Mercurio, Kim Walker, Stephen Heathcote and Danny Radojevic. I could go on: Chris Sheppard, Kelley Abbey, Alana Scanlan, Tony Bartuccio – all these people – you took from everybody, and you look for inspiration everywhere."

But as much as he relished the inspiration of these role models, here in Australia he also hungered for more, and to discover what the rest of the world offered. "I felt like I wanted to go to a bigger pool to find that – and to test myself against a larger majority." He continues: "You know, you put yourself with people (dancers) who are better than you and that is how you improve – because water always rises to its level."

So he took himself off to study in L.A. One of his first breaks came courtesy of the renowned American choreographer, Kenny Ortega (who choreographed Michael Jackson's *This Is It, Dirty Dancing*, and the first three series of *High School Musical*, among many others). Ortega cast Cash as one of the lead dancers in Cher's "Love Hurts" Tour, which kept him occupied for 10 years, touring the world. During this time his talent also drew the attention of other industry icons such as Twyla Tharp, who handpicked him to



Judge
Aaron Cash:
back and
proud.



“

These kids, in this show, right now, could hold their own in any of the versions in America – any of them.”

become her personal pas de deux partner, and Baryshnikov, who included him in his world tour. He was also one of the original *Tap Dogs* when the show premiered back in 1995, and has featured in films including *Titanic*, *Hook* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* as well as the dance documentary, *Move – the film*, which also involved his SYTYCD co-judge, Paula Abdul.

More recently, Cash has been choreographing for “Ballet Revolucion”, the dynamic fusion of ballet, contemporary and modern hip-hop which features elite dancers from Cuba’s premier dance companies Ballet Nacional de Cuba and Danza Contemporanea de Cuba.

But for the moment he is back in Australia and especially proud of the calibre of dancers in the competition.

“I wept when I saw these kids dance because I was so proud. I would get

emotional because we come from here and I see it (the talent) in America – and I see it in Cuba too, because they have the training – but when you see it from your own people, it’s fantastic. These kids, in this show, right now, could hold their own in any of the versions in America – any of them. And what’s so special about them is that in America they are all good but a lot of them specialise: these kids are all so well trained they do every genre.”

It’s not just Cash and his counterparts who have been impressed by the talent in this series. I’ve heard from a reliable source that Nigel Lythgoe, the creator of the popular franchise and regular judge on the US series, has also acknowledged not just the great judging and mentorship of the contestants by the judges on this series but also the depth of talent shown by the Australian contestants – noting that this Australian series has “raised the bar – to where all future productions should aim”! ↗

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Rachel Crompton,
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I can do that!

A dancer has to learn almost everything if they want to get onto the music theatre stage, discovers MICHELLE DURSUN.



THE theatre lights dim, the overture starts, a hush of excitement and anticipation descends over the audience and the curtain rises. It is a heady and thrilling moment for the audience matched by the adrenaline and anticipation of the performers standing side stage. This is the world of musical theatre – a world where belief is suspended and the magic of illusion makes anything possible.

For the performers, this moment is the culmination of years of training and hard slog. So what does it take to reach the top in this remarkable world? Traditionally, musical

“ Students have to develop the mindset that developing new skills and training never stops.”

theatre performers have been required to master the “triple-threat” of singing, acting and dance. Yet modern productions require an ever-increasing range of skills, such as puppetry and stilt-walking (*Lion King*), acrobatics (*Pippin*), playing a musical instrument (*Sunset Boulevard*) and roller-skating (*Starlight Express*). It seems performers are now required to be quadruple or quintuple-threat performers!

So, in light of all this, just how important is the dance component of a traditional triple-threat performers’ repertoire and what type of dance should a music theatre aspirant be learning? Well, to have the best chance at



A case in point

Jordan Pollard (PICTURED BELOW), who graduated from ed5international in 2007, is a case in point when examining the importance of being a triple threat performer. According to teacher Craig Haines, he is equally talented in singing, dancing and acting.

Since graduating Jordan has performed in *Guys & Dolls*, *West Side Story*, *A Chorus Line*, *Chess*, *The Addams Family*, *Pirates of Penzance* and *Candyman* (with Wayne Scott Kermond). This has also meant that at times he has been able to say no to some shows because there was a more appealing offer on the table at the same time.

In addition to this he has still dabbled in the commercial and corporate worlds in between shows, keeping up his skills for the next show that is about to audition. This, according to Haines, doesn't happen if you are only strong in one or two areas . . . you have to be a triple threat!



continuous work, they need to be strong across all three traditional areas and have a few extra skills as well.

Craig Haines is from ed5international, a performing arts school in Sydney. He says it is impossible to predict which shows will hit Australian theatres over the next 10 to 20 years, but it is certain that the overwhelming majority will require traditional triple-threat performers. "If you want to stay employed and make choices in your career, then you have to be good at every aspect of performing arts," he says.

As Haines points out, most musical theatre performers generally get their start in the

industry as members of the ensemble or as understudies. This means they need to be "as good as every swing or ensemble member in the show" in all three traditional areas.

Cameron Mitchell, the artistic director of Brent Street in Sydney, adds that the weighting, in terms of skill sets, largely depends on the show. "If it is *Chorus Line* or *West Side Story* then you must be a great dancer as well as singer and actor. In contrast, if it is *Les Misérables*, you need to be a strong singer and at least be able to march in time."

In terms of the style of dance that students should be learning, a strong ballet technique is an important foundation in addition to jazz and tap. Andrew Hallsworth, the director of musical theatre at Patrick Studios Australia in Melbourne, advises that even these three styles are just the basics. "I think all musical theatre students should do class in all genres including pas de deux, ballroom and Pilates". He adds that it is imperative that musical theatre performers show a "technique" regardless of their dance ability. If you are a brilliant singer and actor with only basic dance skills, "you still need to show technique: strong body posture and carriage; a long line; legs and feet turned out and lovely upper body and arm line". The landscape of musical theatre is changing all the time, reflecting popular culture as well as what appeals commercially. Hallsworth advises that performers need to keep broadening their skills – including learning other genres such as hip hop.

So in addition to a range of dance styles, how important is it for musical theatre performers to develop non-dance skills? "The more you can do, the more shows you are right for and the more you will work," advises Mitchell. Being able to play a musical instrument or perform acrobatics can help you stand out from the crowd and open the door to more opportunities.

At ed5international, students are encouraged to have a least one trick that they can pull out at an audition if required. "Everyone has been at an audition where, after five to six hours of dancing, the panel

MAIN IMAGE: Nathan Benhayon, Chaska Halliday and Sam Parkes from Brent Street in 'Golden Eye'.

ABOVE LEFT: Craig Haines: "The more feathers you have in your cap, the more employable you are."



ED5 students performing 'America' from West Side Story.

will ask to see what acro anyone can do," Haines says. While not everyone needs to have acro in their repertoire, "if it comes down to you and just one other person who is equally as good as you, but they can flip, and they need a trick in the show, guess who is going to get hired?"

Survival skills

Strong performance and dance technique are not the only skills music theatre performers require. They also need discipline, professionalism and resilience. At Patrick Studios Australia, Hallsworth says students learn "how to survive in the industry, including how to conduct yourself in a rehearsal room, how to inspire a creative team, and manage your life while performing eight shows a week."

Students have to develop the mindset that developing new skills and training never stops. "I encourage my students to be active during

free time – learn the piano, learn to juggle, read music or explore a new dance genre. You can't be brilliant at everything but you never stop learning," Hallsworth advises.

A music theatre career will involve some "down time" – that is, periods of unemployment. Haines advises that students should be prepared for these times and suggests it is wise to combine live theatre work with other forms of employment, such as corporate or commercial work or teaching to get through the sometimes "disheartening" quiet times. As he says, even if you are the best singer, the best dancer, the best actor, the best tapper, the best lead, the best swing and the best understudy, "you still need to be prepared to sit out every now and then" due to casting requirements. Sometimes "being a master in your field is not enough because some things are out of your control when it comes to casting shows, such as height and ethnicity".

So, a music theatre performer needs a broad range of skills to stand out from the crowd or, to put it another way, "make sure that you don't have any weaknesses", as Haines says. "The more feathers you have in your cap, the more employable you are." As Mitchell says: a music theatre performer has to have the "confidence to be able to stand up and say 'I can do everything!'"

TIPS

How to stand out

Be open to all dance styles

Maintain strong technique

Keep up extra skills, such as a musical instrument

Learn discipline, professionalism and resilience

for all that's best in theatrical dance

The Australasian Dance Association (formerly known as the Federal Association of Teachers of Dance Theatrical Branch), has undergone a fantastic "facelift" throughout its' Grades Jazz & Tap Syllabus to celebrate its inception. The Syllabus work is now performed to updated recorded music, & new & relevant styles to the dance industry have been introduced.

The ADA provides a syllabus that fosters excellence in Jazz & Tap Dance & Classical Ballet in a form that will take the dancer from their first steps to professional

performance level. The ADA aims to create an environment of caring for its' members to help them achieve their goals as teachers & the students to achieve their goals as recreational or professional dancers. The examination format of the ADA aims to give a fair, balanced & honest assessment to the teachers & students. It also enables senior students to gain qualifications as a dance teacher recognised throughout Australasia & the Asiatic region. The ADA also caters for the recreational dancer with

Dance Assessments in Jazz & Tap Dance with the emphasis on group dance enjoyment while still teaching the importance of understanding rhythm & technique. The vision of ADA is to continue updating & refreshing the syllabus, fostering the aspirations of its' members & to offer scholarships to students who exhibit potential in any of the genres of dance embraced by the ADA Syllabus. We're very excited to see some of our studios students among the top 20 of "So You Think You Can Dance"!



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