

[STUDENTS DISCUSS SUMMER EXPERIENCE](#) • [BATSHEVA GUEST WEIGHS IN](#) • [AUDITION INFO](#)

San Francisco
Conservatory
of Dance
SUMMER LEE RHATIGAN, DIRECTOR

The Conservatory's Newsletter – By Dance Students, For Dance Students

news

Summer '08 Recap



2008 marked the addition of another milestone in the ongoing evolution of the Conservatory's cutting-edge Summer Intensive Program: the introduction of works by Ohad Naharin. With works by dance icons William Forsythe and Jiri Kylian already in its repertory, the Conservatory takes considerable pride in now having the endorsement of three of the world's foremost contemporary choreographers—all of whom send their personal emissaries from overseas to adapt excerpts of their work on the Conservatory's students.

Mr. Naharin's emissary, Batsheva dancer Bobbi Smith, not only adapted excerpts of *Deca Dance*, *Seder* and *Max* on sixty students, but also conducted daily classes in Mr. Naharin's unique movement language known as "gaga".

In addition to studying the works of Naharin, Forsythe and Kylian (those of the latter two taught by former Frankfurt Ballet dancer Thomas McManus and Netherlands Dance Theater ballet mistress Elke Schepers), students also enjoyed the opportunity to work with esteemed choreographers Christian Burns, Cheryl Chaddick, Alex Ketley, and Robert Moses, as well as with Summer Lee Rhatigan, Chiharu Shibata, Tristan Ching, Brion Charles, Patricia Jiron, and several guest teachers.



More than 150 talented students from 30 states and five countries came to dance eight hours a day, six days a week, for four, six, eight or ten straight weeks. Ranging in age from 14 to 23, they hailed from a wide assortment of dance studios and college/university dance programs (including U.C. Irvine, CalArts, U. of Arizona, U. of Utah, Ailey/Fordham, Juilliard, Cornish, Boston Conservatory, SUNY Purchase, and Lines/Dominican, among others), as well as from professional positions with dance companies (eight students were on summer leave from the Royal Danish Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, Boston Ballet 2, Houston Ballet 2, Milwaukee Ballet 2, Ballet West, Utah Regional Ballet, and Mark Foehringer Dance Company; and six students came to participate in the summer program before taking up new positions with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Complexions, Alvin Ailey 2, Nevada Ballet Theater, Robert Moses' KIN, and San Antonio Ballet Company.

The ten week Summer Intensive Program was comprised of one six-week and two four-week sessions (the first two overlapped). Each day was filled to capacity with technique classes, the creation of new works, and learning existing

BULLETINS

July 2008

... Seventy students in Summer Sessions 1 and 2 performed works by Cheryl Chaddick, William Forsythe, Claire Hancock, Alex Ketley, Jiri Kylian, Robert Moses, and Summer Lee Rhatigan in the July showcases at the Regency Center

... Madelyn Biven, Julia Cost and Jessica Shahinian presented works they choreographed on fellow students to the student body and faculty as part of the Choreographic Apprentice Residency

... Conservatory faculty members Manuelito Biag and Alex Ketley presented new works as part of ODC Theater's production *Local Heroes* at Theater Artaud

... Malinda LaVelle and Miguele de Quadros performed with Manuelito Biag's SHIFT >>> Physical Theater in the *Local Heroes* production at Theater Artaud

... Victoria Canelos, Miguele de Quadros, Sara Genoves-Sylvan, Shannon Kurashige, Malinda LaVelle, and Kendra Sampson performed in Alex Ketley's *Monument* (together with faculty members Christian Burns, Claire Granier, and Alex himself) in the *Local Heroes* production at Theater Artaud

... Fana Fraser, having recently graduated from Ailey/Fordham, went directly from Summer Session 1 back to New York to begin her contract with Ailey II

... Russ Lepley, having recently left Houston Ballet 2, went directly from Summer Session 1 to Montreal to begin an apprenticeship with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens

choreography of the masters cited above.

This was also the second year the Conservatory incorporated its Choreographic Apprentice Residency as part of the summer program (conducted evenings, after the program day), which this year gave ten aspiring choreographers among the student body the studio time and dancers (student volunteers who received a stipend) to experiment and create their own work, under the mentorship of professional choreographers Christian Burns and Alex Ketley.

To give readers several different perspectives on the summer program, this issue of our newsletter includes the impressions of four different participants as conveyed through brief "interviews".

The interviewees are:



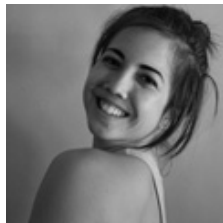
Younger dancers in action



Bobbi Smith, a member of the internationally-acclaimed Batsheva Dance Company in Israel, sent by Ohad Naharin to join the Conservatory's faculty for the summer to teach "gaga" and adapt excerpts of his choreography on the students. Originally from South Dakota, Bobbi studied dance at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School, North Carolina School of the Arts, and The Juilliard School before joining the Batsheva Dance Ensemble in 2005 and then being promoted into the Company



Andrew Pearson, a 21-year old from Pleasanton, California, currently a senior in the B.F.A. program at the University of California, Irvine, whose experience at the Conservatory (Session 3 plus the Choreographic Apprentice Residency) was his first



Madelyn Biven, a 21-year old Hawaiian via North Carolina, currently in her senior year in the Ailey/Fordham B.F.A. program in New York, who returned to the Conservatory for her second consecutive summer, this time for all ten weeks (Sessions 1 and 3)



Emily Karboski, a 15-year old from Seattle, Washington, currently a junior in high school, whose Conservatory experience was her first summer program away from home

Bobbi Smith Interview

Q. Before our very first gaga class, we were told of several conditions specific to gaga classes: non-participants are not allowed to observe; there is no entering or exiting the room during class; there is no drinking water once class has started; no one is to wear a leotard; and at no point are we to stop moving. Coming with basically no knowledge of gaga, these "rules" aroused my curiosity as to what kind of experience was in

Q. When you're learning and rehearsing Naharin's choreography, does taking gaga class every day help you understand it differently?

A. Oh, definitely. Also, the way Batsheva goes about teaching movement is completely different from what I'd experienced previously. For example, as underscored by our insistence on working without mirrors, it's not about the form—it's about



August 2008

... One hundred students in Summer Session 3 performed works by Christian Burns, Claire Granier, Claire Hancock, Alex Ketley, Jiri Kylian, Robert Moses, Ohad Naharin and Summer Lee Rhatigan in the August showcases at the Regency Center

... Nicole Bridgens, Ashleigh Doede, Morgan Eichwald, Sayoko Knode, Malinda Lavelle, and Andrew Pearson presented works they choreographed on fellow students to the student body and faculty as part of the Choreographic Apprentice Residency

... Twenty-one students performed works by Alex Ketley, Jiri Kylian, Ohad Naharin, and Summer Lee Rhatigan in the Conservatory's Benefit Performance at the Regency Center

... Tiffany Armijo, upon completing Summer Session 3, moved to San Antonio to begin dancing with the San Antonio Ballet Company

... Ashleigh Doede returned to Milwaukee from Summer Session 3 to resume dancing with Milwaukee Ballet 2

... Alexandra Freeman, having recently graduated from the University of Utah Ballet Department, went directly from Session 3 to begin dancing with Nevada Ballet Theater

... Nicole Johnson returned to Atlanta from Summer Sessions 1 and 3 to resume dancing with Atlanta Ballet

... Rachel Meyer returned to Salt Lake City from Summer Sessions 1 and 3 and will resume dancing with Utah Regional Ballet

... Emily Mistretta, who spent eight weeks dancing in Summer Sessions 2 and 3, returned to Boston to resume dancing with Boston Ballet II

store for us. For readers unfamiliar with *gaga*, could you describe what a class is like?

A. First of all, I guess I'd get in trouble if I were to call those "rules". The only real rules are that you can't come in late and nobody who isn't participating is allowed to watch. *Gaga* is basically an hour of guided improv, with exercises within the improv—connecting you to your sensations, weaknesses, and strengths. Ohad wants to make a very safe environment for this, which is the reason we never work in studios with mirrors. *Gaga* is not about being watched; it's about connecting to your sensations. As the class itself varies from teacher to teacher, it will be a totally different experience depending on who's teaching.

Q. What's different about your class?

A. I have no idea... I don't know what it's like to take my own class!

Q. Since joining *Batsheva Dance Company*, how has practicing *gaga* influenced your ideas of dance in general?

A. I had never taken a *gaga* class before joining *Batsheva*, and it has completely changed my whole idea of dance. It broke down all the walls. It made dance my life, not something I go do. It showed me how I had lost complete connection between my senses, my effort and my pleasure. Through *gaga* I connect to my strengths, but am not trying to prove anything.

I also gained the sense that there is plenty of time. So much about dance feels like it can be about improving ... improving, getting the job done. All of a sudden I came to *Batsheva* and it was like, "Hey, where're you running?" I never realized I could have so much pleasure from dancing.

Q. The members of *Batsheva Dance Company* come from a wide variety of backgrounds—some having trained extensively in ballet, others in modern dance, and some with very little dance training at all but with a background in a different art form, such as acting. *Gaga* workshops are given for dancers and non-dancers alike, and the *gaga* movement language is taught in schools in Israel. What common educational threads does such a wide variety of movers get out of *gaga*?

A. Pleasure of movement. I think that's what *gaga* gives everyone.

Andrew Pearson Interview

Q. What made you decide to come to the Conservatory?

A. One of my teachers from the University of California, Irvine, [UCI], David Allan, has been coaching and mentoring me in choreography. He is a longtime friend and colleague of

what's inside the form, and what different texture to bring to the movement, such as 'thick' or 'soft'. We also do a lot of improv in *Batsheva*, and *gaga* class helps a lot with that.

Q. What was your experience like teaching at the Conservatory?

A. It was amazing to see a group of dancers transform in three weeks—even in a day—and how the switch could be so fast and so meaningful. It's not like they lost anything, they just kept gaining. Being around Summer [Rhatigan] and all the teachers in the faculty was also incredible; it was so inspiring to watch and be a part of.

Q. What do you think young dancers can gain from the combination of *gaga* classes and learning Ohad's repertory?

A. They can more easily make the connection between class and choreography and how there is no real difference. The continual research from class can fall right into the choreography. Also, learning Ohad's choreography allows you to exercise the different elements you practice in class, such as explosive power, floating bones, different textures, and finding connections to your sensuality and your silliness. Dancers can gain a better understanding of their sensations, their madness, their joy, their pleasure, and their passion to move not only just in class and choreography, but even in how they do a simple, everyday gesture—say, hold a glass of water.

Q. You're now back in Tel Aviv, rehearsing a new season with *Batsheva*. Did the experience of teaching at the Conservatory carry over to what you're up to now?

A. Of course, it's a continual research. The teaching enhanced my curiosity. Watching how people receive material or take corrections made me rethink a lot of things I'm doing with my own dancing. For instance, how clear I can be in my own body to convey what I think or what I have to say. It's also amazing to see how excited people get about something I'm doing every day. The Conservatory experience made me feel excited to be doing what I'm doing... I can see how important it is.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A. I miss you guys! I hope I come back soon. And thank you, Summer.

movement. Once I could tap into that, it was easy to shift from one class or choreographer to the next.

Q. How did working with professional choreographers on the creation of new work, and learning excerpts of *Jiri*

... Arolyn Williams returned to Salt Lake City from Summer Session 3 to resume dancing with Ballet West

September 2008

... Following a performing tour in Peru with Mark Foehringer Dance Project/SF, Toni (Antoinette) Lum returned to SFCD to participate in Summer Session 3 and was invited by faculty member Robert Moses to perform his new work *Toward September* with his company Robert Moses' KIN at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and on tour in Fort Collins and Denver, Colorado

... Victoria Canelos, who spent ten weeks dancing in Summer Sessions 1 and 3, moved to New York to begin dancing with Complexions Dance Company

... Alena Darrish, Becca Henderson, Jessie Feller, Kaitlyn Dykstra, Lydia Sakolski-Basquill, Michael Nguyen, Lena Thieme, Morgan Eichwald, and Nika Clark, all of whom have completed at least one SFCD summer session, joined the Conservatory's year-round program

... Students in the year-round program began their Fall semester, studying with Andrea Flores, Alex Ketley, Summer Lee Rhatigan, Chiharu Shibata, and guest artists



October 2008

...Shinichi Iova-Koga began a four-day workshop in Butoh dance for year-round students

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 2008

... End-of-semester [Open House and Showcase](#): December 13, 2:45-4pm at City Ballet School.

... [Conservatory New Years' Workshop](#): December 30 – January 2

Summer's [Rhatigan], and he thought it would be very beneficial for me to attend the Conservatory, especially as a choreographic resident. He introduced me to Summer when she came to teach at UCI, and I was so taken with her approach to teaching that I immediately applied for the intensive. From speaking to students who had attended the program in the past, I knew I would be participating in a rigorous work schedule, and that I would be working with, and learning from, very qualified and interesting instructors.

Q. You participated in the *Choreographic Apprentice Residency* as well as the regular summer program. Can you describe what it was like to work as both a dancer and a choreographer, and how you met those different challenges?

A. Working as both a choreographer and dancer is something I have become used to thanks to the program at UCI. At UCI, the students all dance and choreograph for each other. At the Conservatory, my dancers were also my peers in the program, but I had never met them before. It was challenging to have less than a month to both create and experiment with my own choreographic ideas and voice, and to learn how my dancers interpreted my movement and ideas so that I could fully utilize their talents.

As a dancer, it was a challenge to learn the large amount of material from a number of different choreographers while still learning and training my technique. It didn't take long though for my stamina to build, and for me to realize that while each choreographer may have a very different approach, they are all looking for a validity in their dancers'

Madelyn Biven Interview

Q. You attended the Conservatory for the first time during the 2007 Summer Intensive Program, doing the six-week long session that focuses primarily on the work of William Forsythe. What was the experience like, and what made you decide to return this summer?

A. My experiences at the Conservatory during summers '07 and '08 were distinctly different, yet both entirely worthwhile. In 2007, I came to the program with minimal knowledge of William Forsythe's improvisational language, but with a desire to experience his art, as well as to gain some enlightenment about contemporary dance. My other reason for coming to the Conservatory had to do with the audition class that Summer taught in New York. I had never experienced a teacher like Summer, and the liberation I felt after two hours of ballet that day was extreme.

From the very beginning of the

Kylian's work, influence your own choreographic ideas?

A. Working with these artists opened my eyes to what else is out there. I was able to pool what I learned and pick and choose what approaches may or may not work in my own choreographic process. I wouldn't say that my idea of choreography, or my internal artistic voice, altered through this experience, but the tools I gained will help me to better dive into ideas and ultimately help me to better produce my future works.

Q. What did you find most useful about the program? What do you plan to continue working on in the future?

A. What I think is so great about this program is that it's designed to improve any dancer, no matter what his or her preferred genre of movement or visual aesthetic might be. Though ballet technique is emphasized as a foundation for movement and body knowledge, it is not represented as the be all and end all of the art form. The faculty really wants the dancers to come away from the program with a great sense of themselves as movers, and to understand why we move the way we do: what we love about it, what we can and want to say with it, and what joy and fulfillment we can bring to ourselves and others. Instead of drilling right and wrong, the faculty opens our minds and sends us away with tools to continue our growth as artists. For myself, I learned to never accept perceived limits of the body, and also a variety of new ways that movement can be used to communicate.

Q. Can you describe some of the differences between the Forsythe and Naharin work? How did the focus on these choreographers influence your work in other classes?

A. One difference between the two choreographers was the intent of their work. Forsythe's improvisational techniques recognize a space in which we design points, lines, and arcs with our anatomy—like fine-tuned architects. We create the movement as a visual representation of the designs we configure in our heads. With Naharin's language, the intent of gaga is very specific to personal and internal sensations, not external architecture. A person may look like they aren't moving at all, but their mind is working on a deliberate texture. I love that gaga is taught to dancers and non-dancers alike because it's not about an aesthetic. I also loved having no mirrors in the studio during gaga. Movement or sensations would happen to me.



program, new information was everywhere: crawling up the walls and spreading across the floors and ceilings. I was immediately engaged. Ballet class became more than a dance class—it was a communal construction site. The dancers surrounding me were all very different, and I was fascinated by the encouragement of individuality. The process of learning about yourself is infectious at the Conservatory, which is one of the reasons I decided to return. Thomas McManus is another reason I decided to come back in 2008; he pours out information about Forsythe's work. He maintains this energy throughout the session, even though I'm sure we exhaust him—as he exhausts us! This kind of trade-off was also one of the reasons I came back—I wanted to work hard. The Conservatory is also the only school I know of in the U.S. that offers this kind of contemporary work over the summer. The workshops in New York are for sure less intense, and definitely not as personal.

Q. This summer, the Conservatory added Ohad Naharin's repertory and "gaga" movement language to its curriculum. You stayed for the full ten weeks of both the Forsythe and Naharin-oriented sessions. What was it like to work so intensely for such an extended amount of time?

A. Doing a ten-week intensive program this summer was an incredible ride. I keep finding summer memories and images in my dreams, speech, thoughts, and especially my dancing. My body is rediscovering what it's like to take class in a familiar environment (The Ailey School) with a new set of beliefs. By "beliefs," I simply mean what my intent is as a dancer and an artist, and this has evolved and changed, much due to the ten-week-long dance-fest I did at the Conservatory.

I had fun inside and out of the studio with new and old friends, which I think is always important to do. Once I realized that I trusted what the Conservatory was doing each day, I didn't have to think about how much I was working because the exertion was also a constant renewal. My sense of humor spread into my work, art, and voice; I could laugh and cry at the same thing. My mind seems much sharper after those ten weeks. The range of movement styles and amount of choreography sculpted my mind into something strong, yet spongy.

It's impossible to detach myself from the experience of community when I think about the Conservatory. I'm still attached to the artists I worked with. It reminded me that dance is a balance between self and community, and honoring both. The Conservatory's faculty is awesome, great as teachers, but also for conversation. I'm thankful that I

rather than me creating them, and it was very powerful. Bobbi Smith never asked us to contrive sensations, so each dancer's experience was his or her own discovery. I loved finding pleasure everywhere in gaga, and this was very easy and very rewarding to apply to my other classes.

Forsythe's choreography is appealing to the technical eye because of the articulation necessary to define such specific shapes and spaces with the body. Focusing on his work helped me to physically expand my ideas about form in other classes, especially in ballet class where lines are a valuable source of energy and momentum. The effect of Naharin's choreography in my other classes was very mind-opening. I noticed habits I had developed over the years, and rather than judge myself, I just tried to be more aware of the effort in my body and the calmness in my mind. For me, Naharin's choreography is so provoking because the subtleties and boldness of movement all come from one place. I noticed that my mind always had to cycle and circulate to let go of ideas, and I used the concepts I learned in gaga classes to find possible answers in my other classes. Those last weeks at the Conservatory, I did not rush my process of discovery or force anything to be created. I reveled in the effort of this relaxation.

Q. The students who attend the Conservatory are given quite a bit of personal responsibility and freedom in terms of collaborating and exploring movement. Can you describe what it is like to work so closely with other students in that kind of atmosphere?

A. Working so closely with other students in an encouraging atmosphere suits my ideals about art. I loved watching the dancers and becoming familiar with their movement, even before getting to know them personally. It was gratifying to see how movement texture fitted personality. I learned a lot about my fellow dancers just by dancing with them because we were able to make choices freely and deliberately. I'm glad we are given not only freedom, but responsibility to study movement as well. Movement was never dumbed down, and thank goodness, because how else can a student mature? I appreciated how the teachers and choreographers were also open to learning from us, which was in contrast to the one-sided relationships I've found in other schools.

I'm attracted to passionate people, so I had a great time meeting and working with new artists. The Conservatory provides a sanctuary to do this. I felt close to my peers from the beginning of the program. I think we had enough respect for dance to trust our differences and to delve into

danced all ten weeks because my connections and relationships at the Conservatory are more solid. Being some sort of gypsy at heart, I think it's important for me to spread my eyes by traveling to different places. Dancing at the Conservatory allows me to ride that wave, but also to dive deep, which is a luscious combination.

a study of them, like researching creatures in the wild. The collaboration between dancers, musicians, choreographers, and teachers was a fine, fine mix, and as a result of those ten weeks, I feel like a valued artist with a thrilling responsibility to make things happen.

Emily Karboski Interview

Q. This was your first summer at the Conservatory. What was the experience like?

A. I really enjoyed the whole experience, and I'm already considering coming back next summer. The program has rigorous dancing, but the atmosphere in the studio was casual and friendly, and I made some close friends who I still keep in touch with. The main difference between the Conservatory and my school in Seattle was the flexible schedule. Each day was completely different; sometimes we had yoga or a sensation class, and sometimes we had two ballet classes in a row. This spiced things up quite a bit, and it was really nice to have variety.

Q. The Conservatory schedule is very intense, with many classes and a great deal of choreography to learn and collaborate on. What did you find most challenging, and how did you work through those challenges?

A. What I found most difficult, and exciting, was processing the information being thrown my way by all of the teachers. Each technique class was completely different depending on which teacher you had. I really wanted to improve in each class, and it was challenging to retain the corrections so that I could work on them in the next class. I found it helpful to keep notes on the corrections from each class so that I could look them over later.

Q. The Conservatory classes focus on a wide variety of movement styles, and

each teacher approaches work from a different angle. What new ideas did you encounter?

A. Each teacher was very different. "Sensation and Technique" was probably the most foreign style to me. The idea that I could improvise and have no idea what I was doing, or was going to do, but at the same time be completely clear in my movement took me a while to grasp. Once I did, and my classmates did, I could see and feel a huge difference. I think that this clarity in improvisation will be useful in all of my work.

From Summer [Rhatigan], I learned that it's okay to show your desire and effort to other people. It's how they notice you, and it shows your charisma and character, which is interesting to watch.

From Alex [Ketley], I learned that it's important to use the whole body for every movement. A simple gesture affects the entire body. It's never just a leg or a hand; it originates from the core and expands from there.

Q. What was the most exciting thing you learned while at the Conservatory?

A. Each teacher at the Conservatory taught such a different class and had such diverse critiques that the information I gathered from their classes touched on all different aspects of being a dancer. I felt that if I could apply them all, or even most of them, it would make me an extremely well-rounded dancer.

Newsletter Contributors

Julia Hollas came to the Conservatory's first summer program in 2004, and has been following her belief in the school ever since. After graduating from the University of Utah in 2006, she now dances with the year-round program and works as their Administrative Project Manager.

Megan Kurashige first came to the Conservatory in the summer of 2005. She fell in love with all the people there and has been dancing with them ever since. Before this happy relationship, Megan danced with Ballet Pacifica in Irvine, California. She reads incessantly and is currently obsessed with P.G. Wodehouse.