



"Hate the floor on the way up, love it on the way down."

Kerry Hubata

Creating something beautiful for the moment

Kerry Hubata co-founded The Evanston School of Ballet with Phyllis Wills, her lifelong teacher and mentor, in 1968. Under Wills' guidance, Hubata earned her Cecchetti teacher's certificate, performed with the Evanston Concert Ballet, organized a liturgical dance group, and has become an enduring hero of classical ballet education in the Chicago area. Her students have gone on to perform with New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, the Royal Swedish Ballet, and Pennsylvania Ballet, to name just a few. Hubata often asks students questions like, "Are you still breathing?" or "What's the most exciting step in the combination?" or "How does it feel to do it this way?"—and she listens to the answers. Lynn Shapiro recently watched her teach and asked about the philosophy behind her classes.

What do you see as your greatest responsibility to your students? To help them become the best people they can be.

How do you develop that? By showing respect for the individual—you're not trying to tear them down, you're helping them get better. I want to be honest with my students. I want them to make an honest effort. I don't care if they don't get it

right away. That takes years. Working hard for something you love and not seeing the reward in sight is life in microcosm. It's worthwhile that you're creating something beautiful for the moment. It may not be complete, but it's still beautiful.

How do you encourage students to work harder? It depends on the individual. For one student, I had to notice her the minute she came in and engage her on a personal level. Another would work hard only if she saw someone was watching. Flowers bloom simply because they *have* to, even if there's no one to see them. You hope that your students get to love this enough so they reach that potential.

How do you foster the relationship between technical and artistic development? Live music helps because right at the barre you feel like you're performing. Technical concerns have to come first, or else you're using the wrong muscles and could injure yourself. But there's so much more than technique. One of the problems we have is students who work so hard they tense up. You want them to be expressive, but they're trying so hard to get the technique that they're actually restricting themselves. Sometimes, I have to tell them perfect isn't enough! It has to be beautiful. And they look at me like I'm out of my mind!

In class you said, "Eye contact is mind contact." What do you mean? You have to understand what you're doing. If you're dancing by imitation, it might work for a while, but you will end up looking like a robot. Movements have to go through your mind before they get to your muscles. When you see a beautiful *développé*, Miss Wills used to say it's an emotional

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experience. Fonteyn never raised her leg up that high, but my goodness, the artistry there!

How can a student achieve lightness? Lift your body off your legs; try to remain in the air longer; hate the floor on the way up, love it on the way down! You can't jump and leave the floor slowly. That's why in *degagé* at the barre, you mustn't drag your foot. It's about attack, speed. If you don't feel energetic, fake it! You may have a performance one day and not feel energetic, so you've got to get used to making energy.

How can a student avoid wiggling in *frappé*? If you're stretching your spine, you're not going to wiggle. Think of putting air pockets between the vertebrae and using the space above you.

You told one student, "Oh, good, you fell forward!" Why? It showed she wasn't arching and pulling back. Many students tend to fall back. That particular student has a tendency to collapse and over-arch the spine in *attitude en arriere*, so I was thrilled because she was trying so hard to fix it, she over-corrected.

What's your feeling about falling in general? You have to fall! It's a hard lesson because students get embarrassed. We don't want them to get hurt, but you have to have enough energy and be free enough that you actually might fall. You have to approach things with abandon to learn how far you can push. When a child learns to walk, there's a lot of falling. You eventually find out where that center is.

I think it was Martha Graham who spoke about the line between earth and heaven—isn't that alignment? Getting yourself right with God and getting yourself lined up in gravity and space; it works hand in hand.

How has your work in liturgical dance influenced your teaching? Dance is something sacred. The poet John Keats wrote, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." I've always seen that connection. The discipline of dance brought me to the discipline of religion. When I'm teaching, that's when I'm most alive. ■

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