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Dear LUTSF,

RE: LISA ULLMANN TRAVELLING SCHOLARSHIP FUND REPORT

I am writing in regards to my report for the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund that is enclosed, for your information. The project, entitled; 'Jazz dance technique, history, and teaching practices', took place in February 2017 for a period of 3 weeks. I was invited to study alongside jazz dance specialist, Dr. Sheron Wray, Associate Professor of dance at UCI, and Artistic Director of 'JazzXChange' dance company.

The purpose of the project was to study Jazz Dance technique, and further develop my teaching and choreographic practice. This was successfully achieved by engaging in a programme of: observing and participating in technique classes and performances; exploring models of practice; and digitally documenting the learning experience.

Particular highlights of the project involved attending rehearsals with JazzXChange dance company, and developing my knowledge of the use of improvisation within Jazz Danced. It also provided the opportunity to perform with live musicians, who provided the soundtrack for the devised movement material. I learnt a great deal throughout the process.

What was useful, was having a clear programme of activities. This was largely facilitated by my host, Dr. Wray, therefore I would recommend this for future awardees.

I plan to share the information with regards to the project via an online blog at:

<http://www.artistryyouthdance.com/news/lutsf> and

<http://www.artistryyouthdance.com/jazzdanceresearch>. The information learned will also be shared with current and future students and dance artists, through lessons and choreography.

Overall, the project was a great learning experience. I have had the opportunity to reflect upon my teaching practice, and make adaptations where appropriate. I am also encouraged to further develop my choreographic practice, and create new works for both learner and professional dance artists.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for a fantastic experience.

Yours sincerely,

Kamara Gray

Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Report—Kamara Gray

My research project involved travelling to the USA for a 3 week period of continued professional development at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). I was invited to study alongside jazz dance specialist, Dr. Sheron Wray, Associate Professor of dance at UCI, and Artistic Director of 'JazzXChange' dance company.

The project took place in February 2017 with the aim of studying Jazz Dance technique, and further developing my teaching and choreographic practice. Further aims included advancing my knowledge of Jazz Dance history, its connection to dance forms of the African Diaspora, and effective teaching methods to facilitate learner engagement. To achieve the proposed aims, the project involved observing and participating in technique classes and performances; exploring models of practice; and digitally documenting the learning experience.

I observed and participated in daily lectures and rehearsals, led by the UCI Faculty. The UCI classes included Jazz technique led by Dr. Sheron Wray; Dance Science with Dr. Kelli Sharp; and choreography rehearsals with Professor Emeritus of Dance, Donald McKayle, and Distinguished Professor Lar Lubovitch. To support the classes at UCI, I engaged in rehearsals with JazzXChange; technique classes at the EDGE Performing Arts College in Los Angeles; classes at the Debbie Allen Academy of Dance; company class with Jazz Antiqua dance company; and watched live performances.

The main classes that I participated in were Dr. Wray's Jazz technique classes for undergraduate students, and JazzXChange rehearsals. Key features of these sessions were the inclusion/teaching of improvisation, the connection of dance with music, and the incorporation of Jazz dance history. A key component of Dr. Wray's teaching and choreography is the use of improvisation. Marshall and Jean Stearns highlight that dance in African diaspora "places great importance upon improvisation, satirical and otherwise, allowing freedom for individual expression; this characteristic makes for flexibility and aids the evolution and diffusion of other African characteristics" (1968, 15). Cited in Jackson, p.40, 2001).

Examples of how it was included in the lesson plan, included the use of divergent discovery tasks where learners entered and exited the space exploring movement vocabulary. It was interesting to note that throughout even a short process of this activity, learners deepened their musicality and developed their creativity.

The lessons aimed to develop music appreciation (particularly Jazz music) by utilising a variety of music that featured different rhythms and time signatures, oftentimes using multiple different tracks for the same exercise. This enabled the dancers to intrinsically connect the dance with the music, enhancing their musicality. Learners were also encouraged to listen to Jazz music, as homework, to further develop their ability to critically analyse the music.

Subsequently, Jazz Dance history was included with the use of authentic jazz movements, discussions regarding the origins of the movements, and videos to showcase the pioneers of the movements.



With Dr. Sheron Wray, and students from UCI

This effectively engaged learners, and provided the appropriate historical context.



With Dr. Sheron Wray, and dancers from JazzXChange

Improvisation was also utilised within the JazzXChange company rehearsals, to devise movement. The Company uses ‘...the principles of jazz performance to empower communities to embrace and celebrate innovation’ (<http://jazzxchange.org>). Many of the rehearsal sessions included working with live musicians to provide the soundtrack for the devised choreography. Working with JazzXChange also provided the opportunity to be introduced to Dr. Wray’s research topic and development of ‘Embodiology’, which can be described as ‘a neo-African approach to contemporary dance improvisation’ (<http://dance.arts.uci.edu/dr-sheron-wray>).

My research included observing rehearsals led by Professor Emeritus of Dance, Donald McKayle, and Distinguished Professor Lar Lubovitch, both renowned for their work in Contemporary Dance. What was most apparent through observation was that both choreographers were clear about communicating the intention of the movement. Mr McKayle, took the time to work with dancers to devise choreography and effectively communicate the intention. Mr Lubovitch taught a repertory piece, and therefore facilitated the accurate replication of the original choreography.



Lar Lubovitch rehearsal

The final classes of note that I observed were Dance Science lectures, led by Dr, Kelli Sharp. Dr. Sharp had a very engaging teaching style, and utilised a range of resources to keep the lesson interactive. A key learning point gained from the lectures was the importance of tailoring your warm-up to strengthen the specific muscles that you plan to use in your choreography that particular session, rather than maintaining a wholly set warm-up from class to class. For example, if your choreography has multiple fast direction changes, consider how your warm-up can support these specific movements.

The fellowship also enabled me to connect and develop relationships with other companies within the region. Through an introduction by Dr. Wray, I was able to attend company class with Jazz Antiqua Dance & Music Ensemble, a company who “... celebrates the jazz tradition as a vital thread in the cultural fabric of African American history and heritage, and a defining element of the American experience” (<http://www.jazzantiqua.org>). I effectively enhanced my knowledge of their creative movement phrases and style.

Overall, I had the opportunity to engage and participate in a high number of classes, rehearsals, lectures, and performances, as outlined in my initial proposal. I learned innovative ways to develop exercises and jazz technique within learners. I have increased my knowledge of the connection of improvisation with dance forms of the African Diaspora, and have a better understanding of teaching practices that can be used to incorporate its use within lessons. On a professional level, I effectively connected with and developed relationships with new practitioners. I have since taken the time to reflect upon my teaching practice, and am also inspired to further develop my choreographic practice. I would highly

recommend the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Fund to any dancer, and I thank them for this unique opportunity.