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## Three Lives in Dance

by Gillian Ellis

After much planning, OU Music, Theatre and Dance has entered into a major partnership with Oxford Community Schools to offer classes at the Oxford Arts Conservatory (OAC), which is opening this fall. The conservatory is designed for high school students seeking an opportunity to specialize in arts education at a college-prep level.

The interest in dance has proved to be especially strong, and consequently three OU dance program alums will serve as conservatory teachers this year. We thought we would catch up with them to see what they have been doing in the years since graduation.

**Jasmine Page-Cox** will teach the advanced level technique classes in the program. She says, "While focusing on preparing my students for a higher education dance setting, my goal is to make their transition into college and pre-professional work as smooth as possible. I will be pulling directly from experiences and elements in the Oakland University curriculum, giving students the technical background needed to flourish in a college program."

Jasmine, who is from Detroit, began dancing at Northwestern High School at age 14. While in high school, she trained with Michael Means and former Ailey II member Aimee Cox. She earned summer scholarships and work-study opportunities at the Detroit Opera House and worked with choreographers and teachers Hope Boykin, Christopher Huggins, and Gina Ellis. She holds a B.A. in dance from Oakland University and apprenticed with OU's company-in-residence, Eisenhower Dance, during the 2011-12 season. Jasmine has danced with Oakland Dance Theatre, OU Repertory Dance Company and The Brown Dance Project, choreographed by OU alum **Rodney A. Brown**, who is now assistant professor of dance at The Ohio State University. She has taken the stage with internationally known R&B recording artist Elgin "Ginuwine" Lumpkin, as well as performed as a guest with Eisenhower Dance in *Motown in Motion*. Currently, Jasmine teaches dance at Michigan Technical Academy, Eisenhower Dance Ensemble Center for Dance and now Oxford High School.



**Katy Koivunen** will teach intermediate ballet and modern courses at OAC. She is also beginning her fourth season performing with Allure Dance Company, a jazz company based in St. Clair Shores. The ensemble performs regularly at The Berman Center for the Performing Arts in West Bloomfield and at the MGM Casino and Hotel in Detroit. **You can read more about the company here.**

In 2011, Katy made her national television debut as a featured dancer for the band Nickelback at the Lions Thanksgiving halftime show. She began her life in dance studying at Sandy Adams School of Dance, Redford Dance and in the Creative and Performing Arts Program (CAPA) at Livonia Churchill High School. While dancing with CAPA she was selected to perform at the Michigan Youth Arts Festival and was the only dancer awarded as a Gala Recipient. While at OU, she performed with Oakland Dance Theatre and OU Repertory Dance Company, and in 2010 her choreography was selected to be performed at the American College Dance Festival. Katy received her B.F.A in dance performance and was the recipient of the 2010 MaTiIDa Award for Outstanding School Service in Dance.

Since graduation, Katy has been teaching at Bella Pointe Dance, as well as choreographing around the Metro Detroit area. Her competition students have placed in the top five overall dances on multiple occasions, making her the junior division top teacher at Star Systems regional competition.



She is delighted to be able to combine so many aspects of dance to build a career. She says, "Making a living out of teaching, performing, and choreographing has been the most rewarded experience of my life. Every day I am able to share my passion for dance with my students. I am excited to share the knowledge I learned at OU with the students of the Oxford Conservatory."

**Samantha Bingham** will teach "Introduction to Dance" and directing the student company at OAC. In January, the Oxford students will be sharing their first performance with Oakland University's Repertory Dance Company. Samantha says she received a well-rounded performing arts training before enrolling at OU. She graduated with a B.F.A. in dance and a minor in Spanish language and literature in 2010.

She has performed throughout Michigan and the Midwest, but has traveled much further afield for work. She has danced at Disney World Orlando and in Las Vegas. In 2012, she spent a semester studying dance, as well as art history and education in Berlin, Germany, on a trip organized by UM Flint professors **Dr. Lauren Friesen** and **Dr. Elizabeth Kattner**. We celebrate an "it's a small world" moment by noting that Dr. Kattner recently joined the OU dance faculty.

In the fall of 2014, Samantha will complete her M.A. in arts administration at UM Flint. Her concentration is in performing arts administration and she plans to use her degree to help promote the arts here in her home state. She says, "The dance community here in Michigan is very close

knit and collaborative. There is a lot of talent here and so much potential, I don't like seeing artists leave here for other areas. That is why I want to help grow the dance and arts community in Michigan." She will make another contribution to that goal this fall when she choreographs UM Flint's production of *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Samantha says she is very much looking forward to teaching at the Oxford Arts Academy. "My favorite part of teaching dance is seeing my students grow as dancers and as people. I love seeing the joy and pride on their faces after they successfully execute a really difficult move for the first time. It is also very rewarding to watch them mature. I always aim to create a respectful, hardworking and focused atmosphere to instill professionalism in my students but still let them have fun with dance so they enjoy it. I also love sharing an artistic experience with my dancers in rehearsal and with audiences through my performance or choreography. That is why I do what I do."

Photos:

*Top right: Jasmine Page-Cox*

*Middle left: Katy Koivunen. Photo by Kevin Ridge*

*Lower right: Samantha Bingham*

Oxford Community Schools accepts students from outside their district and anyone interested in the conservatory will find more information on the **Oxford Community Schools' website**.



## SUMMARY

