

Balancing Pointe #3 – Erica Gionfriddo
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Audio Transcript

Kimberly Falker: *Balancing Pointe*, episode three.

Announcer: Welcome to the *Balancing Pointe* podcast, where we invite you to join us on a journey into the amazing world of professional ballet. Our guests will provide you with an inside peek into this exclusive world, while offering motivation and inspiration on how to not only succeed in dance, but also in life. And now your host, Kimberly Falker.

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Kimberly Falker: Hello everyone, and welcome to Balancing Point. Before we get started with today's inspirational interview, I'd like to take a moment to ask you to stop by our website, at balancingpointe.com. Now that's Balancing Pointe P-O-I-N-T-E, like the pointe shoe. On our website, we will share with you more information about each of our guests, along with photos and videos. Also, on our site, we provide personal stories and resources. So please stop by. And while you're there, if you'd like to receive updates on our upcoming guests, just sign up for our emails. You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook, so we look forward to keeping in touch. All right, so let's get started.

Today you'll hear from Erica Gionfriddo, who shares with us her journey and dance, which is proven to be a much different path than many professional dancers. Erica did not discover her passion for dance and did not begin her formal training until she was 16. She then attended Shenandoah Conservatory in Virginia, obtaining a BFA and dance performance and choreography. During this time, Erica toured to perform internationally. After college, from 2007 to 2010, Erica served as school director and production assistant for Moving People Dance Center, where she honed her administrative skills while teaching and choreographing for the student company. After this, Erica, along with Curtis Uhlemann, co-founded ARCOS Dance, where she serves as executive and associate director choreographer and dance.

ARCOS Dance is a small but vibrant touring company that plays with cutting edge choreography, evocative sound design, interactive video and theatrical elements to create a wholly unique contemporary performance. Throughout this interview, Erica inspires us with her journey to finding her own individual path and dance and becoming extremely successful along the way.

Erica, I've shared a bit about your journey and your accomplishments. Could you please share a bit more about yourself and your personal journey in dance?

Erica Gionfriddo: Great, Thank you. Well, I—my personal journey in dance started a bit late, maybe a little different than most professional dancers. I started really seriously training when I was 16. Before that, I was training very seriously in opera. I was in musical theater and show choir. I played the flute. So I've always been in the performing arts. And when I was 16, a friend invited me to a ballet class at the New England Dance Conservatory. A ballet class. And it was way over my head and I loved it. And the teacher kind of noticed me because I have nice feet, nice extension, had some potential. So he kind of pulled me aside after class and said, "Is this something you're interested in?" And that was the turning point for me. And it was just, ever since—yeah, that was the day it was so challenging. Something about dance that really made me want to stop everything else and pursue that exclusively.

Kimberly Falker: So what did you do after that class? You were in high school still, you said?

Erica Gionfriddo: I was in high school. So I enrolled in their pre-professional program. They had a really strong training program. And it was a husband and wife team. They worked very closely with me for two years and helped me get into a college dance program, which was the...

Kimberly Falker: Oh, wow.

Erica Gionfriddo: ...the next step for me. So, I then went to the Shenandoah Conservatory in Winchester, Virginia. It's part of Shenandoah University. And I trained there for four years, and I hit the program at a really

interesting time. My freshman year, one of the full-time modern faculty retired. So I had rotating teachers every semester for the rest of my time there, which was actually really lucky. Anyone out there who's been in a BFA dance program knows that you have the same teachers four years, three times a week kind of thing. So I felt very lucky to be exposed to that many different types of information.

Kimberly Falker: So inspiring that you were able to start late and find that within yourself there was a passion, and you still were able to find success and a career out of it, which I think is very inspiring to the listeners that may not have followed the traditional path of starting at three.

Erica Gionfriddo: I know.

Kimberly Falker: Moving through the ranks, you know?

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah. Well, and since then, you know, in my professional career teaching and being part of running a pre-professional dance school myself, I've seen kids who do start when they're three and are just exhausted and burnt out by the time they're 19. And to me, that's such a shame. You know, they've worked so hard and they're so beautiful and talented, and there's no joy left, which is not always the case, but I've definitely seen it happen, so.

Kimberly Falker: After you graduated from college, what was your path after that point in time?

Erica Gionfriddo: Again, my path was not typical. I had—a lot of professors were really stressing going to New York City or going to a major city to audition and put yourself out there. And again, I just didn't feel like that was right for me at the time. I am not fond of New York City. I'm not fond of big cities in general. So I knew that that was not going to be the right way for me to go. And I ended up going to a summer program out in Santa Fe, New Mexico with Moving People Dance Theater. I had never heard of them, but they had a great looking brochure. They had brought in Giordano to perform with them, and they were going to be teaching, so there was some, you know, name associated with it. The price was right, the timing was right. So I decided to go. And while I was there, I got to

take class with a lot of their students that they train year-round and saw that many of their advanced students were performing alongside the professional company. And they were just incredible. And I decided I wanted to know what they know. So...

Kimberly Falker: Right.

Erica Gionfriddo: I talked with the then-Artistic Director of Moving People Dance Theater, Ronn Stewart, and said, you know, “What would happen if I moved out here?” And he offered me a scholarship to their school. And I trained, and I took five classes a day for a year straight with them, which was just incredible and so fulfilling. And then they invited me to join the company that summer, and I began performing with them. So that was kind of the start. Maybe a delayed start according to other people. But, again, it was just—the training was so evident in their students that I knew I wanted to get there.

Kimberly Falker: So how long were you with them?

Erica Gionfriddo: I was an apprentice and a student for a year, and then I performed with the company for three seasons. They have since folded and the school has moved on. But before that, you know, I performed with them. I began teaching at the school, and I eventually took over as School Director for a while. Because of that unique perspective of having gone through the training for a full year, and, you know, being a direct result of the training. I felt very passionate about it. And that was a whole other path. I didn’t expect to be going down that path. But it did allow me to refine my teaching, um, and administrative skills. It allowed me to choreograph regularly. I was choreographing on the student company. So it was allowing me to continue to refine my abilities, continue to train by taking classes, and all of this while I was there. So it was a huge growth time for me.

Kimberly Falker: Do you feel that your education at Shenandoah helped prepare you to do that in a different way than if you hadn’t have gone there?

Erica Gionfriddo: Absolutely. I mean, being in a BFA program is very unique. I'm still baffled when other college majors have afternoons off, or can sleep in in the morning. So, I mean, being, being part of a BFA, especially a performance focus in college, is what it's like in the real world. You know, you wake up at...

Kimberly Falker: Right. Do they cover in those programs, creative and all that, do they cover some of the business side of dance, to help prepare dancers to do multifaceted tasks?

Erica Gionfriddo: They do some. And, you know, from students that I am still in contact with who are in school now, they do much more of that these days. I got enough. I mean, I could—I knew how to create an Excel sheet. I can mock up a budget, I can write a bio. You know, I'm trained in, in that sense. It's definitely been sort of a crash course since then, especially starting my own company. But, I mean, I feel like I had access to things that were definitely helpful.

Kimberly Falker: And then what about with choreography? Was that always something within you, or do you think maybe your past with music and theater helped you have a different eye for creating dances?

Erica Gionfriddo: I think being part of a choreography focus as part of my BFA...

Kimberly Falker: Oh, it was? Okay.

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah. So my BFA is officially in Modern Dance Performance and Choreography. So it was something that I really studied, and it did not come naturally at first. I mean, I could choreograph for musicals at that point, you know?

Kimberly Falker: A little bit different, though, huh?

Erica Gionfriddo: But yes, really starting over and studying the craft of choreography is something that I really enjoyed. and something that I continue to do to this day. You know, it's not just something that we throw

out there. It's a method and it's a technique that we continue to develop. And now I'm lucky enough to have a partner that I have can do that with.

Kimberly Falker: So, Erica, you've now started your own company, ARCOS Dance. Can you please share with us a little bit more about that?

Erica Gionfriddo: After running, after performing with Moving People Dance Theater, training with them, and running the school in Santa Fe for several years, Curtis and I both realized that it was not fulfilling for us anymore. And we decided to embark on our own journey in that sense. So we created ARCOS Dance for ourselves. It's an interesting business model that has been attractive to a lot of marketing and PR people who have come our way. We, Curtis and I, are both co-owners and co-founders of the business of ARCOS Dance.

So we are owners in that business. And we also have a nonprofit ARCOS Foundation for the Arts. So we set that up very deliberately because we want to be able to control our own legacy moving forward. So that's the business side of it. And we're also still incredibly passionate about education, and outreach, and sharing, you know, the artistry of dance moving forward. So ARCOS Foundation is set up to not only support the company and its efforts, but to bring educational programming to various communities, as many as we can.

ARCOS, you know, it came about through many brainstorming sessions and it was one of the first words to be thrown out there. Curtis came up with it. He really likes the word Arcadia. So we're really into the kind of mix of an old feeling, kind of, you know, if you've seen the logo, the architectural, you know, kind of renaissance feel of the actual logo is, you know, something old blended with something modern. So we really like that feeling of that, you know, what is that time? It's a little bit mysterious and part of our history. And we kept coming back to the word ARCOS, and we kind of circled around several times and we decided it was right. It literally means arcs in space.

Kimberly Falker: Oh, wow.

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah...

Kimberly Falker: I like that.

Erica Gionfriddo: ...which kind of works because our—a lot of our ensemble choreography, because of Curtis's background, is very spatially oriented, spatial patterns, big pathways arcs through space. So, we decided it was the right one and we went with it.

Kimberly Falker: So, just backing up for a second, you started this company and what year was it?

Erica Gionfriddo: We started, we premiered in the fall of 2011...

Kimberly Falker: Okay.

Erica Gionfriddo: ...was our first performance.

Kimberly Falker: And it started in Santa Fe. And now you guys are in Austin. Tell me about that transition.

Erica Gionfriddo: The first year, our first season, we were a tuition-based performance ensemble. And we created it because there was this, wealth of highly trained dancers in the area who had come through some of these schools that we have taught at, and other students—sorry, other professionals who were in the area looking for contemporary modern work, which there wasn't a lot of. So we created it to kind of, to serve that need and bridge the gap between these really advanced students and these professionals. So it was a mix of students and professional dancers, and we produced four full shows in eight months, which was crazy.

Kimberly Falker: Wow.

Erica Gionfriddo: But it was...

Kimberly Falker: So the students would pay to be in it, and then the professionals would get paid or do it voluntarily. The professionals were not getting paid in that season.

Kimberly Falker: They were being exposed, at least.

Erica Gionfriddo: They were being exposed, and they were, you know, given meaty choreography to perform.

Kimberly Falker: Yeah.

Erica Gionfriddo: And we knew that we were not going to stay with that model forever. It was really a way to get off the ground. We obviously strongly believe in paying professionals for their time.

Kimberly Falker: Right.

Erica Gionfriddo: So it was something that we were trying out and seeing where it would go, and it really launched. And we got incredible coverage and incredible response from the Santa Fe community in that first year. And were able to, going into our second season, transition into a full-time performing professional company.

Kimberly Falker: Oh, that's fast.

Erica Gionfriddo: It was very fast. Yes. We work fast. And we did that because there were, you know, professionals interested and we, you know—that was the goal from the beginning. was to have a professional touring company. So the next step was to, you know, have a contract with 10 dancers and pay them per show, and...

Kimberly Falker: Wow.

Erica Gionfriddo: ...get it off the ground. So,

Kimberly Falker: And then the students would continue being trained...

Erica Gionfriddo: The students would continue training, and we had tried in Santa Fe, a second company for a while. And that is something that has since been put on the back burner a little bit, but is definitely something that is in the back of our mind all the time, starting up as a way for some of those younger students, perhaps like myself, when I was, you know, 18,

19 and kind of raw, but really wanted some training that would be an opportunity for younger dancers to be involved in the company.

By the end of our second season, we were really looking for what the next step was with the company. And we didn't see that next step happening remaining in Santa Fe. So we began a search for a new city, a new state, a new community where we could stretch a little bit further. So we did a national search. We looked in depth at four or five cities, I believe, and settled on Austin because it was so vibrant and so alive. There's obviously an incredibly active art scene here, but it's not saturated with dance yet. So the audience is hungry for a new voice on the scene, and hungry for something very contemporary.

Kimberly Falker: That's fun.

Erica Gionfriddo: But on, you know, every time we visited Austin, it was so, I mean, there's—it's just beaming with life and growth, which is invigorating, you know. And it's something that has spurred us in into a new...

Kimberly Falker: New energy, I bet.

Erica Gionfriddo: A new energy. Yeah. We really needed, you know, kind of a shot in the arm and, you know, to re-inspire and remotivate and refocus. So it's been fantastic, and people have been so welcoming here. I mean, everything they say about...

Kimberly Falker: And when did you go down there?

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah. The artistic director, Curtis, has been out here since December of last year.

Kimberly Falker: Okay.

Erica Gionfriddo: And I have since the early spring been going back and forth between here and Santa Fe, about one month on, one month off.

Kimberly Falker: And then did you bring your dancers down, or is it kind of starting from scratch again?

Erica Gionfriddo: You know, we've held several auditions here, and there's actually a great dance community here, who also are looking for something, a new voice on the scene and a new contemporary work to partake in. So we have been working very hard to and fast to try to get something set up for our dancers here. We're still looking for a space where we can have rehearsal and class consistently. We're still operating mostly as a pickup company. So we have dancers kind of all over. We have a few in Chicago, one in New York, two in Boston...

Kimberly Falker: Oh, wow.

Erica Gionfriddo: So, yeah, for shows that we do, we generally, you know, put the call out to everyone, whoever's available for these three weeks, we've got a gig here. These five people are available. Great. Let's pick the rep from there. Which is also not a great way to work. I mean, it definitely happens and...

Kimberly Falker: Probably nerve wracking,

Erica Gionfriddo: And it's very exhausting. And, you know, it's part of the reason why we wanted to find a new home that was big enough to accommodate, everything that we wanted to do. so that we can have our dancers based here creating work most of the year.

Kimberly Falker: So one of the questions I like to ask in the interviews revolves around kind of a failure, disappointment that you've had along your journey. Could you share specific experience and what you've learned from that experience?

Erica Gionfriddo: Yes. This—the one thing that came to mind was there was a period where I was still living in Santa Fe. The company that I had danced for had folded, and we had not yet started ARCOS. So there was sort of a transitional year where my path was not clear, to say the least. And I picked up some work with a choreographer who was not based in Santa Fe, but was creating a project there. And on the recommendation from a friend decided that I would, you know, meet him and see if he needed another dancer. So I worked with this choreographer for several

months and committed quite a bit of my time to it, and felt it was just not a great experience. You know, it was an experience where I felt that I was taken advantage of for my accomplishments that I had already set up in a certain place. I did not get paid. I was asked to learn extensive amounts of rep and was then filmed performing them, but never told what those were for.

Kimberly Falker: Oh, my.

Erica Gionfriddo: It was just a bizarre feeling. And nothing against the directors. They were very sweet, but there was no communication between me volunteering my time, and him with some bigger plan that I was not aware of. And I think that I had kind of a wake-up call at some point thinking, “Yes, I want to be dancing and I want to be performing.” And dancers are always very generous because they, they want to work. But I think it made me become a little bit smarter about where I devote my energy and time. And that feeling of being taken advantage of definitely spurred me towards the creation of my own company. You know, affirming that I want something where I’m in control of how this company operates, how this company treats its artists, and the kind of environment, working environment that we create for our company. So that was an interesting one. It was, you know, just one of those wake-up calls where you realize, oh, you can’t just say yes to everything. You to be a little discerning. So...

Kimberly Falker: And I’m sure actually a lot of people can relate to that, whether or not they’re a dancer, because that’s kind of a business lesson that unfortunately most people run into at some point.

Erica Gionfriddo: It’s tough. Yeah.

Kimberly Falker: And it oftentimes it’s the transition from or into kind of quote unquote being a grownup, you know. It’s like you kind of all of a sudden realize, wait, I do have skills, and I have a value.

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah.

Kimberly Falker: So what’s one piece of advice regarding dance that you’ve received that has kind of stuck with you over time?

Erica Gionfriddo: That's another great question. Another person that I've worked very closely with in Santa Fe and throughout—she travels—is Echo Gustafson. She was my master trainer in Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis, which I practice now, and teach as well. And she has been an inspiration. And she told me at some point during, recently, you know, within the last two years or so...because I train very seriously in ballet. I take ballet almost every day of the week, in addition to company class, and rehearsing, and things like that. And, you know, I was frustrated one day about turning or something, balancing, you know, why can't I make this look the way it looks on ballet dancers? And she told me, "Well, you have to decide if that's what you really want." You know, not that you throw away your training or decide that it's not important, but if the kind of movement that you're doing is all into the floor, or articulating, or even as simple as turning off balance in your own repertoire, you have to make that decision and be okay with that in the way that you train in other disciplines. And that really clicked for me, because I love ballet. I am so inspired taking ballet class with professional ballet dancers. They're incredible and inspiring to watch. And I know that I am not them, you know...

Kimberly Falker: Right.

Erica Gionfriddo: So it's a very, it's a hard lesson to learn. It's hard, so hard not to compare yourself. And, you know, as contemporary as our movement is, and as contemporary as modern dance is becoming, you still have to have that ballet base. So it's very, it's hard to not get caught up in that.

Kimberly Falker: My interpretation is that it, you don't want to get caught up in comparisons to the detriment of your own progress.

Erica Gionfriddo: Correct. Because what I have, and what I'm training for, is different than what this ballet dancer is training for to be the Sugar Plum in a few weeks here. That struggle, that continuing quest for what that is, that ballet aesthetic, only strengthens our contemporary and our modern. So...

Kimberly Falker: That's true.

Erica Gionfriddo: And that's why I always take class. I take advanced class, I take beginner class, I take class with adults, I take class with students who are incredible, you know,

Kimberly Falker: And you can, you can learn something by all of those things. And that's, again, that's something to transfer into quote unquote real life.

Erica Gionfriddo: Absolutely.

Kimberly Falker: Those of us that aren't involved in dance, you know, the words that you're speaking, I'm transferring into my life of what I do. And it's the same thing we all get caught into holding ourselves back because we're looking at others all the time.

Erica Gionfriddo: Exactly. Yes.

Kimberly Falker: So you mentioned that your family was, because of their arts background and performance background, was very excited about your choices that you made. How have they continued to support you along your journey?

Erica Gionfriddo: One thing that comes to mind is that my brother is now a lead lighting designer for a lighting company out of Boston. And we've actually just in the last year collaborated professionally for the first time, which was fantastic.

Kimberly Falker: Oh, fun.

Erica Gionfriddo: So he came out. We were doing a show in Santa Fe, and he created the lighting and technical design for our show. So that has been a really great way to feel supported by the family.

Kimberly Falker: Do they come and watch you—your company perform and you perform?

Erica Gionfriddo: They have a few times. You know, my family is in Connecticut. I grew up on the East Coast, so flying out to Texas or New Mexico is quite a trip. They have seen a few things and I, you know, faithfully bring home videos and send them links to things to watch. So they're definitely involved in the process.

Kimberly Falker: So what's something that's exciting you right now in your career path?

Erica Gionfriddo: Well, this move to Austin has been incredibly invigorating. And the thing for me personally that's been so exciting is finding a community of other dancers here. As I said that, you know, the Austin community is not so saturated with dance right now, and the modern dance that exists is kind of in their own pockets, so to speak. Dancers are not only excited to hear about a new contemporary company that's coming in, but as a dancer, I've found this community of professionals who are taking class, who are rehearsing, who are using each other in work, that are all incredibly supportive and very talented.

I was actually blown away when I first got here and started taking class at the level of dancers here in Austin that are not affiliated with Ballet Austin. Ballet Austin has its own thing and has their world. And it was just so refreshing to see that there were other working professionals outside of that. I've become part of a community ballet class organized by a ballet dancer here, where there's like eight to ten professionals who all go in on renting studio space together twice a week. And we all teach each other and take each other's class. We rotate teachers every week.

Kimberly Falker: That's neat.

Erica Gionfriddo: And it's, yeah, it's a beautiful and really fun environment to get the classes that you need. Everyone needs to take class, practice some teaching, you know, get some feedback, but also just network and meet other people. And it's been growing. It's just started in September.

Kimberly Falker: Is there a name for it or?

Erica Gionfriddo: It's called Austin Community Ballet. Relatively new. And it, it's very informal, but it's an interesting model and it's been going very well.

Kimberly Falker: I would imagine that'd be a great model for many cities.

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah. I would highly recommend if anyone has the motivation to do it. And it's been very simple. I mean, we're working on a cash basis here that no one's making money, but it's an incredibly rewarding experience to just be around these professionals so much.

Kimberly Falker: That sounds like a great program to be involved in. At this point in the interview, I'll be asking a question from an actual aspiring dancer. Today's question will come from Katie, who's an apprentice and hopes to become a professional dancer someday.

What is your opinion on how or whether to choose a summer intensive? If a dancer wants to become a professional and your opinion, how important is the program they attend?

Erica Gionfriddo: That's a great question. I think summer training is incredibly important, and incredibly enriching at any point. I think choosing a summer program requires an active role from the dancer. I think dancers should be picky, and I think they should look into the places that they're considering. They should do some research on the teachers who are going to be there. If it's affiliated with a company, they should be interested in the company and in some respect, either performing or training or otherwise. And I think finding a program that interests you in some way, whether it's a specific teacher or you enjoy the rep that they do, or you think they're dancers are something that you want to look like. I think those are the important factors. I don't think, you know, if you find the work that you're interested in finding, that's what you're going there for, you know?

Kimberly Falker: Right.

Erica Gionfriddo: You're going there to study with this person, and it's incredibly important to get out there and get new information...

Kimberly Falker: Right.

Erica Gionfriddo: Especially if you're in a very intensive program year round where you have the same teachers. If you're lucky, your school has enough money to bring in guest artists throughout the year, but a lot of times they don't. So the summer's really...

Kimberly Falker: That's true.

Erica Gionfriddo: ...your time to get out there and get reinvigorated, and get new information that's only going to inform you and make you better.

Kimberly Falker: Now, this is not a part of that question, but kind of from that question, based on some of the comments that you made earlier on ballet and contemporary: if a student that's very serious hopes to go into contemporary, what are your thoughts on whether or not it's a good thing to do a contemporary program in the summer? Or is it good to continue to build the base of ballet, and contemporary could come later?

Erica Gionfriddo: That's a great question. I still strongly believe that ballet is the base for everything. Now that's not to say that you shouldn't start training in contemporary. And I really feel that the top programs, the top summer programs out there are going to give you both, you know. If you feel, you know, during your regular training program, if you feel that you're lacking in ballet, then I would seek out a ballet summer program that's going to give you that. I mean, that's a chance to, to really get that extra shot that you need. If your year round program is so heavy in ballet that you're not getting the contemporary that you want, seek out a more contemporary-based program.

Kimberly Falker: That makes sense. Yeah. I don't think dancers have the luxury of choosing one or the other anymore. I mean, the trend of dance these days, you have to be able to do it all, so.

Kimberly Falker: That's true. Yeah.

Erica Gionfriddo: Especially if you want to be a contemporary quote unquote dancer, you've got to have the ballet background. and the contemporary background, and the jazz background. Like, you know, you've got to be able to do it all, so you might as well start doing it all from the beginning.

Kimberly Falker: Right. So what's one audition advice that you could give to dancers, based on your experience?

Erica Gionfriddo: I think it's actually quite similar to the summer program: that dancers should be very active in the auditions that they choose to go to. If you just need exposure, if you know that you're a nervous wreck when you get in front of people, then yes, just go to as many as you can. If you're actively seeking work, then I think the same rules apply. You should know a little bit about the company. If they're offering classes somewhere beforehand, you should take a class with them. If they're offering workshops, you should show up to those. If you know that you love the company and you want to audition, the best thing you can do is to be present beyond the audition.

Kimberly Falker: Oh.

Erica Gionfriddo: The audition is just part of it. And, you know, if you're serious about it, if you know, this is the company I want to dance with, you want to be in that city, you want to be at their school taking classes often as possible and get in front of them. And I mean, cattle call auditions are so hard.

Kimberly Falker: I bet. Can't imagine.

Erica Gionfriddo: And you have such a brief amount of time to get yourself across. So, you know, if you're smart about who you're auditioning for, and you have a little bit of back information, then that's only going to give you the advantage over the other girl who just got off the bus because she heard about it yesterday, you know.

Kimberly Falker: So when dancers, for instance, audition for you, do you— obviously being in person is great, but if somebody had to send a video audition, do you also give that the same weight, or do you feel sometimes

that the odd videos might be so doctored up that it might not be true? Do you know what I mean?

Erica Gionfriddo: I do know, yeah. Generally, we do accept video auditions kind of rolling year-round. It's not really a substitute for being in person. Although I certainly understand the circumstances. If you're serious about dancing with a company, you should try to be there in person. Yeah, the video thing is hard and, you know, I mean, we're a very small, emerging company and we still have to wade through resumes, and remember who looked like what, and look back at the video, you know. So for even bigger companies, you know, if they've got 150 people in front of them in person, the one in the video is probably going to be looked at after that, you know?

Kimberly Falker: Right, right. That makes sense. So if you want to dance professionally, this is going back to the question from the dancer. If you want to dance professionally but also want to attend college, how do you make the decision what to do?

Erica Gionfriddo: That's a great question. I've actually helped quite a few dancers try to negotiate that very dilemma. And it, again, it comes down to what you truly want, and if you can find the program that's right for you. I definitely don't think it's worthwhile to go to a BFA program that you don't enjoy just because you want to dance. It's entirely possible to major in something else and dance as well. So again, it would go back to asking yourself those questions and doing a little bit of research and, you know, is there a training program that you love? And is there a school nearby that you can get the degree that you want in?

Kimberly Falker: Right, right.

Erica Gionfriddo: A school nearby. And I actually, some of our dancers are finishing up their either master's degrees or undergrad degrees in Biology, in English, in business, you know, just to get a degree and are dancing and training in that city as well.

Kimberly Falker: And I've actually spoken to a couple—on these interviews—to a couple principal dancers that are doing their college classes online,

which, I mean, what a wonderful thing to be in this era where you can actually...

Erica Gionfriddo: Absolutely.

Kimberly Falker: ...pursue both passions.

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah, it is fantastic. We've had a few dancers who have finished up either high school degrees or finished—gone back and are finishing up their masters online and are still able to fly out whenever we need them. So it's great.

Kimberly Falker: Right, right. I mean, I guess only main thing that you would miss in that is the traditional college setting and experience, which has its values, I would imagine.

Erica Gionfriddo: Yeah. And that's one of those questions that you need to ask yourself: is that experience...

Kimberly Falker: Mm-hmm.

Erica Gionfriddo: ...important? Is that social aspect something that you are lacking and something that you need?

Kimberly Falker: Mm-hmm. And I'm hearing from a lot of parents, you know, and I'm obviously one of those included is, in our brain, we've always thought, you know, based on what we know, and it's really difficult to shift and say it's okay.

Erica Gionfriddo: Right.

Kimberly Falker: And I think that that's been a tricky one for a lot of parents whose children have shown a dedication and a passion that wasn't expected. You know, it wasn't just, or it hasn't turned into just an afterschool sport.

Erica Gionfriddo: Right.

Kimberly Falker: And so I think it's difficult for parents to also embrace the many paths available as being acceptable and good, you know? And it's nice to see the differences of success, you know. Like yourself, you took one path and it's turned out to be fabulous. And then other people are taking different ones. And the ones that you've, some of the students that you've experienced and counseled, you know. You see them taking multiple different paths and if you're listening to your heart, it sounds like you will find the right direction.

Erica Gionfriddo: Absolutely.

Kimberly Falker: Sorry to preach to you, but

Erica Gionfriddo: No, no, it's great.

Kimberly Falker: Coming from a parent perspective. And no, I think that in the end it's one of my goals with this podcast is to allow both dancers and even family members to hear that there are options, and slow down and listen for a moment instead of just getting caught in either the automatic, as you said, and getting burnt out at 19, or not following your path and getting stuck in an academic scenario that you're not happy with. You know, I could see both paths being a problem.

Erica Gionfriddo: Absolutely. Well, the whole education model is, is changing, regardless of the arts. And it's, I mean, maybe that's...

Kimberly Falker: That's a good point. Yeah.

Erica Gionfriddo: ...a conversation for another podcast, but the whole...

Kimberly Falker: Well, I've thought it fascinating. If I could go back in time, some of these, opportunities for college students to travel the whole time that they're in college and, you know, be doing in their classes online at a cafe in Berlin, you know. That would be a fabulous path to have chosen, you know. Skip the sorority.

Erica Gionfriddo: Right.

Kimberly Falker: All right, well you know what, in closing, I'll just ask a few final questions. If you could go back in time to your 13-year-old self. Now obviously, this is for you a little bit before dance, maybe I should just switch it to 16-year-old self: with the wisdom and confidence and lessons you learned along the way, what advice would you give to yourself today?

Erica Gionfriddo: I think first of all, if, if I had told my 16-year-old self that I would, a little over 10 years later be running my own company, I would have never believed you. I think learning the lesson of deciding your own artistry is something that would've been beneficial earlier on. And that's unfortunately something that you can only come into with experience. You know, at 16, at 18, and even in your early 20s, you're still, you know, it's technique, and the next level can only come with experience. And the kinds of dancers that I enjoy watching perform, and the kinds of dancers I'm inspired by are past that. They're older and there is a weight to their artistry that can only come after a certain amount of time. Orienting myself that way early on maybe would've been the best advice.

Kimberly Falker: Yeah. Be patient, it's okay.

Erica Gionfriddo: Be patient and start exploring and making your own decisions about what your artistry is, because it can only be yours. It can't come from someone else.

Kimberly Falker: I love that. And what's interesting is, in a different, in different words that has been the consistent message from everybody I've spoken to, you know. So it's very interesting that that seems to be within the true foundation of success.

Erica Gionfriddo: Mm-hmm.

Kimberly Falker: And I could, again, transfer this into life, you know? If I walk into a dinner party and I'm feeling not non-confident, you know, I think that it makes sense to look within and what is it about me that is my secret weapon to be successful in meeting new people, you know? And it, and it's not the same for my husband. He's not the same as me, you know?

Erica Gionfriddo: Exactly.

Kimberly Falker: So I think that that's fabulous advice for everybody. And with the same wisdom, confidence, and lessons, what would be your advice to aspiring dancers today?

Erica Gionfriddo: I think my best advice in my humble experience would be to, as a young dancer, gather as much information as possible, because that's the only way that you'll be able to make the right decision for you. So getting as much exposure in the realm of dance, in as many disciplines, with as many different teachers, as many different choreographers as you can get your hands on early on, I think will help defining the fulfillment of your path moving forward. And to never be afraid to try anything. And you don't have to like everything, but it's all information that's going to guide you to your fullest self as an artist.

Kimberly Falker: That's great. I love that. Well, thank you so much, Erica, for all the time that you've provided us. If somebody wanted to learn more about your company or ask you any further questions, how could they get in touch with you?

Erica Gionfriddo: They could visit our website, our arcosdance.com, A-R-C-O-S, and my email address is part of my bio on the website, so they could email me directly or our general contact info on the website.

Kimberly Falker: Thank you so much, Erica, for being on the podcast.

Erica Gionfriddo: Absolutely. Thanks for creating this podcast. It sounds like a great resource.

Kimberly Falker: And thank you everyone for tuning in. Please join us again tomorrow as our guests will be coming straight from London, England.

[music swells and fades out]