

No Performance? No Problem

Creative ways to earn money from home

BY RACHEL RIZZUTO

With performances still mainly on hold, dance artists are looking for creative ways to make money—remotely. There’s always the option to teach virtual dance classes, of course, but there are also other income-earning avenues to explore. Many dancers have, to use a pandemic-worthy buzzword, pivoted to brand-new careers, acquiring skills that both build upon their dance knowledge and allow them to work from home.

Getting Up to Code

Isaac Owens had the gift of good timing when it came to enrolling in a coding bootcamp through App Academy earlier this year. The Brooklyn-based dancer for Mari Meade Dance Collective was about to start a 16-week, full-stack software engineering course when the pandemic hit New York City. The bootcamp went virtual, and Owens dove in, attending lectures and working on group projects, often coding for 12 to 14 hours a day.

One of the program’s biggest appeals for Owens was the option for students to defer their tuition until they’re hired in the field. Since his graduation in July, Owens has been applying to up to 40 jobs a week, with guidance from App Academy.

He was pleased to discover that his communication skills, honed



Isaac Owens has found his dance background helps him with coding projects.



Sharon Wehner transitioned her Gyrokinesis classes online.

in dance and fitness, turned out to be an important part of software engineering. “In dance, you have to be able to communicate clearly. Otherwise somebody gets smacked in the face or ends up facing the wrong direction,” he says. “My feedback from partners during coding projects was that they often felt like they were learning something from me.”

Movement and Mentoring

Before COVID-19, Colorado-based freelance dancer Sharon Wehner taught in-person Gyrokinesis classes. “But it was hard to get people to try it,” she says. The somatic method wasn’t as popular in Denver. When

the pandemic struck, Wehner took her classes online. To attract interest, she contacted local dance studios and her former colleagues at Colorado Ballet, where she’d danced for 22 years, offering donation-based classes. Enrollment steadily increased, and Wehner worked with a Gyrotonic trainer to refine her business approach. “We did a lot of work about building my brand, finding out who my niche people are, figuring out a good scheduling app that will integrate with Zoom,” she says.

Surprisingly, Gyrokinesis lends itself easily to online instruction, says Wehner. “You don’t need a lot of space, there’s no music required,

and there’s not a ton of hands-on,” she says. She’s kept her classes donation-based and consistently receives between \$10 and \$20 per person, with two to eight people in each class. (For private lessons, she has a sliding scale of \$50 to \$80.) Getting certified in Gyrokinesis typically takes a year—it’s a 135-hour program, including apprentice teaching hours—and costs around \$3,000.

Wehner also started an online mentoring program for pre-professional ballet dancers, called Rise: The Empowered Dancer. “It’s a way to offer them individual attention and guidance,” she says. Participants have access to guest speaker workshops, private coaching and peer support sessions.

Competing and Convening, Virtually

When New York City Dance Alliance’s convention and competition weekends went virtual this summer, professional dancer Savannah Cobb quickly adjusted to the new normal. As an NYCDA employee, she’s used to wearing many hats—judging, serving as dance captain, assisting other teachers and heading up the Ready Set Dance program for dancers ages 5 to 7—but the pandemic opened up yet another opportunity: teaching a virtual contemporary class of her own for NYCDA.

Her experience with NYCDA also afforded her other opportunities elsewhere, despite stay-at-home orders. “I’ve networked over the past five years with so many studios across the country,” says Cobb, who received many virtual teaching requests.

In terms of what to charge as a digi-

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 • If you’re considering a pivot of your own, check out Career Transition For Dancers’ Professional Development/Certificate scholarships. CTFD offers funding of up to \$1,000 to professional performers looking to further their careers outside of dance. Go to actorsfund.org for deadlines and more information.



Savannah Cobb at NYCDA

tal competition judge or teacher, Cobb says there’s a wide spectrum from one organization to the next. “Your pay will vary based on your experience, and it also depends on the size and caliber of your clientele,” she says.

Namaste Online

Dia Dearstyne had considered taking part in a yoga teacher training several times over the last five years. “But I couldn’t swing it—either because of time or money or both,” she says. When the pandemic put her performances with Hawkinsdance in Tucson, Arizona, on hold, the timing suddenly seemed right. “I wanted to do something that I’m interested in, that could keep me really active,” she says.

Though the Yoga Vida eight-week teacher training is technically a 200-hour certification, Dearstyne says it’s actually a much bigger time commitment. “Each week, we have hours of videos to watch, on alignment, anatomy, sequencing, restorative postures, the philosophy of yoga,” she says. “On top of that, we have to observe classes virtually and practice teaching with our assigned cohort.” She took advantage of an early-bird special to secure the \$1,500 tuition for the entirely online training. Once she’s certified, she expects to charge between \$50 and \$100 per hour for private lessons, depending if they are online or in person.

She credits her experience as a dancer, teacher, and nutrition and wellness coach with making her feel immediately comfortable leading yoga classes. “I understand how the body works, yes, but there’s also a sensitivity to the breath work and the cuing and the pacing,” she says. “It’s another version of choreography—you’re setting up a sequence or flow and learning how to talk about it in a way that makes sense in real time.” ■

From left: Caylee Shimizu, Courtesy Owens; Courtesy Wehner; Courtesy Cobb