

To students, teachers, parents, and funders: We are a unique community of lovers of the arts. I hope with all my heart that this letter finds all of you and your families healthy. Being quarantined goes against everything we hold dear as citizens of the free world. But we also know we have a responsibility to each other to do our part and help protect one another. Cyber world had already discovered Zoom. No one thought it would be put to the test in one big swoop. We are all learning how to deal with the technology and Zoom wasn't ready for world-wide use all at once! While I have struggled with how to use this system I was brought to my knees. I just didn't want to learn how to teach remotely because it goes against everything I understand about the art of dance. I cried, whined and acted a bit like a frustrated child. I wondered who I was in this state. But I saw the thing I love dearly being stripped away because of mics, music, pictures and computers that just couldn't handle the task. How do I do this? Well, the next question I asked is how are the children doing this? I got up off my knees, wiped my eyes and began to teach classes the best I could. The students were doing the best they could and we were together, remotely, loving dance. Why is it you can feel emotion when you are watching a TV show or movie but feeling emotion during a remotely held ballet class seems impossible? I need to feel the energy of the student and they need to feel my energy and together we create a sacred space for dance. Teaching ballet is hands on work so students feel the muscle that needs to be working or exactly how to hold the arms and head. Teaching in the classroom also brings breathe into the dance. Are the students inhaling/exhaling at the correct time for the muscles to be able to fire with maximum efficiency? So many details to be observed. But for now we energize on our own and hope that it will be enough. I asked both Jenison and Lauren to share their thoughts and feelings and they are shared below. Monica Coulter created a PBT video for students and she worked so hard on getting that ready so thank you for your talent and dedication. I miss seeing Emily Sapere and Crystal Newson popping in to teach energetic and wonderful tap and musical theater/jazz classes. I miss you dearly and I know their students do also. This weekend would have been our Spring Festival of Dance and we were exploring music of American composer, Aaron Copeland and other southeast artists with a bit of history of the Appalachian region. The students were having fun seeing their costumes for this first time. The costumes will be there for the students when they can safely get them but this special opportunity will have to wait for another time. I am very sad not to be celebrating our end of year Spring Festival of Dance. I am available for conferences with students regarding their training or other questions about dance. Contact me at anna@ballettennessee.org. I send my love and blessings to each and every one of you. Remotely hug your mother this weekend! -Mrs. VanCura

I feel very thankful to have an online platform that allow us to see our students virtually and have classes. However, there have been several obstacles. It is very different than being in person because there is a certain energy that comes from being in the studio together that just can't be replicated through an online platform. As a dance teacher, there are many aspects of dance that we must teach, such as technique, musicality, and artistry. These aspects are easier to explain when we are with the dancers. Half of our job is working with each student hands-on, watching carefully how each step is executed and making sure that the dancer is executing the steps with the correct muscles as it applies to whatever technique we are teaching. Unfortunately the hands-on work we do is just not possible virtually. Another obstacle I have faced with the online platform is having to demonstrate during almost the entire class, however this depends on what level I am teaching. If the students are older and more advanced in their training, I'm able to tell them that I will watch them while they do the combination. However, for my young students, they need the teacher to be actively demonstrating and doing the entire class with them. In order to demonstrate I must stand far away from the computer so the dancers can see my entire body head-to-toe, but this means I do not have the chance to carefully watch them and offer feedback. The final obstacle that I have really struggled with is sound level, including music and my voice. I have tried various ways to play music: through the computer, with a speaker next to the computer, and with a speaker close to where I stand when I demonstrate. Sometimes I use Bluetooth headphones so that I can be heard clearly when I speak, but I have found when I use headphones that the dancers can barely hear the music. During my Modern class with my older students, they respectfully gave feedback on not being able to hear the music, so I tried 3 different ways in the middle of class, never finding a perfect solution to the quality of the sound. These obstacles have proven to be frustrating as a teacher and have sometimes left me feeling very overwhelmed. With all that being said, I am truly grateful to be able to see my students virtually. They are the highlight of these confusing days. I definitely prefer live classes over pre-recorded classes, as we have tried both options with our students during this time. It saddens me that our semester had to be cancelled and that we aren't able to hold our Spring Festival of Dance. Production time is always so magical and fulfilling, yet fleeting at the same time. It goes by so quickly that I hardly have a chance to blink before it's here and then gone. Performances bring all the hard work we have put in the entire season to the forefront on the stage. Parents get to witness their child's hard work also and see how they have grown as a dancer and an artist. Our dancers', parents' and staffs' health and well-being are most important, so I respect our tough decision that we have had to make. However, I wish we were in the midst of tech and dress rehearsals. Thank you to everyone for your support and patience during this time. I miss you all and hope that once things return back to "normal," we savor every second of class time and performance time, because they are both so precious. Love always, Miss Jenison

During this end to our Spring 2020 Semester Zoom Virtual Classes have definitely been a new challenging experience as a teacher of small children. This is not how I imagined the end to our '19/'20 Season going, especially when we started January with such purpose to keep progressing and building on what the students had learned and gained during the fall semester, we had goals. So many of my students were bursting with excitement as we began in February the process of choreographing for the Spring Festival of Dance. Sadly, all of that became obsolete as we realized there would be no recital, no costumes, and no production week madness and fun, and none of the excitement that the stage and performing in front of family and friends brings. That was heavy not only for us teachers, but also very much for the students. With all of this said, I am grateful for online platforms such as Zoom. We have been able to keep connecting and teaching our students on some level, even though it has been a very different experience with challenges on all fronts that we quickly realized. Personal corrections, music quality, and sound levels of music and voice have all been affected, and we have had to learn what to accept for now and what to change or modify to make online class experience the best it can be for our students. Some of my very young students and those who do not have access to internet connections or devices, those are the students I have not been able to see or continue to teach, and that has been extremely hard, even though it is out of my control. I have missed seeing all my students sweet faces in person, but it does make me happy to know those that can join me in Live Classes, are able to move, dance and express themselves...I have seen their joy for dancing shine through once again. That joy and love has been such a gift during all of this, to be able to continue watching my students maintain, learn and progress given such an incredibly difficult time shows how strong and passionate our students are, and how serious they are about their class time. Thank you to my bitty dancers all the way up to my older students, thank you to my parents and family members, I feel very lucky to have been able to teach and know each one of you this year. My students, you have all made me laugh and smile, and I have loved watching you all learn and grown into the beautiful dancers that you are, thank you for continuing to shine bright through this incredibly difficult time, your sweet smiles bring me such happiness! (I have really enjoyed when you show your family pets off or they join you in class time too!!) Parents, I am in awe of all of you, thank you for taking the time out of your "new normal" busy days to set your childs' space and cameras up so that they could join me and continue a form of their class each week! I am a very lucky teacher, Thank you! I hope to be able to dance in the studio with all of you soon again, please stay well, stay safe and know you are all very much missed and loved. - Ms. Lauren

Greeting, all!

My apologies for being so late with this note. I have been working with my Southern Adventist University students teaching Pilates Matwork. Finishing the Spring semester online has been quite challenging as you can imagine. What we as teachers do, whether in artistic or fitness training, can only be translated over the computer with a less than ideal delivery. I can't tell you how much I've missed face-to-face work and hands-on instruction. Now that grades have been turned in I can put my complete focus on PBT and you.

We are all learning how to acclimate to Zoom classes now and I have taken several PBT classes on line to soak up knowledge from the best teachers around the globe who have made this transition more quickly than I have. My main take-away from these sessions is WHERE you are practicing and with WHAT equipment. Space is a real commodity. As you will or have seen in my videos, I am working from my basement. While I have floor space, I've had to improvise with equipment (as some of you may have to do with PBT). When you're ready for class, try to keep all distractions to a bare minimum. Have your stability ball, small yoga ball, theraband and mat close by. While I understand the stability ball may not be something you have at home, we have devised a list of alternatives so you can still use your muscles correctly. Of course, these balls are not expensive to get online, just make sure you have the correct size for your height. We typically use 45" for the shortest dancer, 55" for average height (up to 5'3) and 65" for dancers over 5'4.

I recommend using the video I have prepared *before* your ballet class if possible. It's a great way to turn on your muscle memory and get emotionally focused before class. The theme of this first video is Core and Posture. I hope you enjoy!

Lastly the PBT website has offered their student membership at ½ price (for life!) during this unprecedented time. <https://pbt.dance/?referrer=5b24ff5e86edcd067086ff05>

The reduced membership is less than \$8 monthly and includes tutorials as well as classes for all levels—Juniors through the new Adult division. This certainly is NOT mandatory, just a choice for those who might find it useful.

I can't wait to be with you again in the studio! Stay healthy and safe until then. With Gratitude, Monica