



JOFFREY BALLET STUDENTS STRIVE FOR SPLENDOR AT NJCU

by Arianna Bianciella - Contributing Writer



Taylor Ehlinger. Photo courtesy of Ehlinger.

Taylor Ehlinger, a freshman from Houston, Texas, developed her passion for ballet in third grade watching *The Nutcracker* on a class trip.

“I had never seen a ballet before but as soon as it started, I wanted to be on the stage with all the ballerinas. It was magical, I fell in love with the art form that was created on stage by so many individuals.”

At a later age, she saw Misty Copeland perform in *Swan Lake*, and her love for ballet grew. She was drawn to dance at the Joffrey Ballet School in New York after auditioning for the summer intensive program to practice dance.

Ehlinger is one of 39 thriving ballet students from the Joffrey now attending NJCU to earn a Bachelor in Fine Arts. Along the way she will complete Joffrey’s Trainee program, which gives opportunities and a career for students ages 13-25 in the dance industry.

After the completion of the anticipated Performing Arts Center and Music, Dance, and Theatre building on West Campus, dance students will participate in both the Trainee Program and major in the respective degree program on campus.

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JOFFREY BALLET STUDENTS STRIVE FOR SPLENDOR AT NJCU

“I was having trouble choosing a university or a trainee program, and Joffrey Ballet School had both, so I knew this would be the best option, and I was indeed right. I am so happy that I am getting the best training as well as an amazing education,” said Ehlinger.

Founded by Robert Joffrey and Gerald Arpino in 1953, The Joffrey Ballet School was founded upon balletic principle and remains a renowned dance haven for prospective performers. It is one of the only dance institutions in the tri-state area to teach multiple forms of ballet training, including teachings about physiology to reduce dance-related injuries and maximizing one’s core strength.

Loeke Sakers, a transfer student from Brussels, Belgium, is currently in her final year of study at Joffrey. She was interested in dance from a young age as well. “I loved it right away, but my passion definitely grew after watching the Dutch National Ballet dance Swan Lake around the age of 9.”



Loekke Sakers. Photo courtesy of Sakers.

When she was 15, the NJCU partnership did not exist when she first applied to Joffrey’s summer intensive program. Ultimately when the program became available to Joffrey students, she decided to pursue the B.F.A.

Though Sakers enjoys ballet, she does not limit herself to one form of dance, especially being a Joffrey student, “... This past semester at Joffrey, I got to take theater dance classes, and I absolutely fell in love with it. It’s really exciting to have found something new that I love so much, especially during a time when there isn’t much happening in the world.”

She has been dismayed by the pandemic. “Having to take dance classes mostly from home during the pandemic has been frustrating at times, but finding a new dance style that I love has really helped further my passion for dance and it’s been fascinating to learn more about the musical theater world.” Sakers continues to find comfort in cake-baking and vocal lessons.

Etrita Abdullahu, a transfer student and dancer from Prishtina, Kosovo, is also in her final year with the Joffrey. She noted the trials in studying abroad as a young student, “Being from Kosovo - a post-war country that was still rebuilding and still has many travel limitations and hasn’t yet gotten the visa liberalization from the European Union made it difficult for me to study abroad.”

At first, the Joffrey was a distant star in her mind, but the chance of a scholarship made her consider the experience “a lifetime opportunity.”



Robert Joffrey and Gerald Arpino. Fair use of Britannica.com

Interested in classical ballet, Abdullahu reminisces about the synchronized steps of Marianela Núñez and the whimsical features in the Sleeping Beauty ballet when she was younger. “Dance helped me gain confidence, and it opened a door where I could express myself without words. Many ballets are very close to my heart, but Giselle is one of my most favorite ballets.”

Appreciative of the NJCU-Joffrey partnership, Abdullahu says, “I am thrilled that I became part of NJCU. I have learned many new things that have challenged me to grow as a person and have expanded my knowledge beyond the dance world.”

Abdullahu, Sakers, and Ehlinger all mentioned the discipline in the Trainee Program, especially the styles of dance offered in the program, which is not limited to ballet, also specializing in jazz, modern, and contemporary dance. They admire the tenacity and dedication from the other dancers and instructors.

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CITIZENS UPSET AT NJ TRANSIT DURING COVID-19

by David Waiters - Contributing Writer

NJ Transit, New Jersey's state-owned public transportation system, has faced backlash from many residents for their response to the pandemic and the procedures they supposedly took to protect employees and passengers from the virus.

Before the rise of the pandemic, the transportation company serviced over 800,000 passengers daily with numerous buses, trains, and light rail vehicles. This came to a staggering halt once the state-wide lockdown forced many people to either lose their jobs or work from home if possible. Many students also relied on the service before the pandemic and schools were forced to transition to on-line classes because of the lockdown. At the time, most passengers were essential workers who used the service to travel to and from New York and other major business areas.

NJ Transit has had several months to remedy the countless complaints from passengers and staff, but many of the complaints that were present at the beginning of the pandemic are still relevant now. Even though NJ Transit has stated to have begun cleaning and disinfecting buses and trains every 24 hours and have provided staff with the appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE) as well as follow recommended social distancing guidelines, this all may have been a lie because many passengers and employees have complained that it's nearly impossible to social distance especially during busy hours and that trains and their stops are way too filthy to have been cleaned every 24 hours.

In an interview with NJ Advance Me-

dia, Jerome Johnson, the general chairman of SMART United Transportation Union Local 60, a union that represents New Jersey conductors stated that NJ Transit is lying about cleaning every 24 hours and demanded that the employees receive hazardous duty pay because of the nature of their job. He has recently stepped down from his position on the agency's COVID-19 task force stating that he cannot "sit by and accept NJ Transit's misleading and inaccurate statements about their response to the pandemic."

Since the pandemic began, a total of 990 employees have tested positive and 15 employees have died because of the virus. A widow of Joe Hanson, one of the NJ Transit conductors, is suing the company because she claimed that her husband's bosses did not monitor worksites, failed to follow safety procedures, and violated the Federal Employee's Liability Act. As a train conductor or bus operator this virus has become inescapably dangerous and puts everyone at risk. Even now it has become increasingly difficult for one to protect themselves from the virus. Many passengers must decide between social distancing and getting to work on time and once aboard the train or bus, the passengers who comply with the mandatory mask mandate also must worry about the passengers who refuse to wear a mask even in public areas.

The response to the pandemic has been vastly different in other parts of the nation and New York City, for instance, has been using Ultra-Violet lights to disinfect their trains and buses. UV lights are sometimes used in hospitals to disinfect operating rooms and have been proven

to be effective in killing viruses.

The study by Dr. David Brenner, the Director of the Center of Radiological Research at Columbia University, has proven that this technique is effective in stopping the COVID-19 virus as well.

2020 has proven to be one of the most difficult years for many as we faced record high unemployment, devastating loss both personal and financial, and several lockdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The world may never be the same once this virus is under control. This virus continued to ravage though many households globally and its everlasting effects are still present in this year.

This pandemic is far from over, however, the vaccine has been administered to the public and by the time schools begin to fully reopen and allow in-person classes again, one can only hope that NJ Transit has found a more appropriate way to protect their employees and passengers.



Liberty State Park Station. Photo by Kenise Brown.

KEEP YOUR SHIRT ON: WHAT TO WEAR TO VIRTUAL CLASS

Julie Marie Frances DeVoe - Contributing Writer



How a student should dress on zoom. Photo by Anna Shvets/Pexels

While going over a syllabus as a new student at NJCU, I was shocked when I read “no undergarments or absence of undergarments” under Zoom etiquette. I had to refrain from laughing as I never encountered something like this before.

In all my years of college, the syllabus never had to state we could not wear undergarments. I felt dumbfounded that a professor had to actually put this in her syllabus.

Associate Professor of English Laura Wadenpfohl, who inspired this article said in a Zoom interview that she noticed that the number has been small in terms of violating the dress code but when it is egregious, it has been very noticeable.

She states that, “For instance; someone, a male, okay just let me make that clear on that, a male showing up naked

from the waist up or folks showing up in what looked like undergarments or pajamas to me.”

She also feels that we should not take our classes in bed, “We need to show up in a virtual classroom as we would in a face-to-face classroom. And I believe that for a few reasons; one is that we show respect to ourselves, the other is that we show respect for our classmates. The third reason is that I believe that we take all of ourselves more seriously.”

Wadenpfohl recommended that I reach out to English professor James Broderick but his response was slightly different, “The idea of appropriate dress is always rather subjective.” He thinks that students and faculty should dress in the means that they feel comfortable in because with everything going on, the appropriate dress code may not be a major priority in their life.

When asked if the school and English Department should enforce a dress code, he said, “Going forward, that’s probably an idea worth exploring.” In our Zoom interview, Broderick concluded that he is concerned with students getting to class comfortably and feeling content on what they are going to be taught.

I feel that we should be able to wear what we want but within reason. Wearing what you want to express yourself as a person is one thing, but wearing undergarments on camera is another. It shows our professors that we do not respect ourselves and we do not respect them.

Our professors want us all to thrive in their classes and they do not want us to be distracted by someone’s choice of clothing. I am not saying that we should wear turtlenecks and jeans, but I feel we owe our professors for the duration of each semester to wear something appropriate for class.

It could be a school pride t-shirt with a pair of jeans, or it could be a tank top and a midi skirt paired with a cardigan. I do not know about you; but even to this day, I would imagine what outfit I would wear on the first day of school and the last day of school. I want to think of it as a first impression and an ending impression.

If I did not want to be seen in public and risk humiliation, it was not an outfit to wear to school. Just because we are in a pandemic and are virtual, I feel we still owe our professors the respect to show up either in casual or business casual attire. Leave the revealed undergarments for a private segment.

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KAMALA HARRIS AND THE FLAWS OF REPRESENTATIONAL POLITICS

by Nevin Perkins - Op/Ed Editor

Millions across the nation celebrated Kamala Harris being sworn in as the first female and Black Vice President (VP) of the United States on Inauguration Day. Chucks and Pearls, her signature ensemble was the fit of the day for women across the nation.

To some we witnessed barrier-breaking democracy firsthand. A nation having endured unprecedented political theater and harm, from a man who embodies an alarmingly large portion of America's racist attitude, into the hands of a fighter who has a proven record of siding with the people.

Surely, it can be found in Harris's long-term advocacy for freedom, justice, and equality for oppressed people. Unfortunately, no such record exists.

A surface-level examination of our VP's record would show her history of attacks towards the communities of Black and Brown people during her time as a district attorney and self-proclaimed "top cop" attorney general of California. Let us revisit this timeline of Harris's troubling political history.

Harris, a district attorney in 2010, opposed recreational marijuana. Due to this opposition, her office oversaw the arrests of 1,900 people for marijuana offenses, most of them being Black and Brown people. Understanding this must make it shocking that she could sit and joke on the Breakfast Club radio show about smoking marijuana when she ruined the lives of so many for the drug's usage.

Today, Harris is singing a different tune as she advocates for the national legalization of marijuana. Her motivations were clear in her conformity to a centrist/left position as she sits in the second highest seat in the land and is looking to develop a progressive image.

Sad to say that cannabis users were not the only targets of our Madam VP's politics. She also has made some despicable choices harming people who are Transgender and sex-workers, a community and occupation that have suffered horrendously from Harris "lock em up" politics that keeps nonviolent citizens behind bars.

Not only has she opposed the decriminalization of sex-work by calling it "ridiculous," she has also sent transgender women to male incarceration facilities, placing them in immediate danger. Harris has even gone far enough to support companies that have worked to eliminate online sex-work sites that provide folks with the ability to work safely. Whatever the reason for her crusade on transgender and sex-worker communities, it is clear that Harris has managed to escape having to account for her crimes.

Wait, because we know what comes next, "If she has such a harmful political record then why people aren't speaking up about it?" They are, they are just not being heard over the noise of the Democratic Party.

"As someone from the Bay Area and living in Oakland, I am constantly reminded of her history of locking up Black people in the Bay Area. Her track

record consists of terrorizing Black communities through the prison industrial complex and she has consistently shown herself to be an enemy to the masses of Black people," Blake S., an Oakland, California organizer said.

I suppose the real question is why voices like Blake's are not being heard nationally. Well the answer is simple. America values representation over morals and principles. Harris identifying as a Black woman is far more important in America than her political record. So much to the point where critiquing her automatically makes you a Trump supporter.

The binary political limitations of our democracy have got to go. We should not continue to fall victim to the notion that if we have progressive politics we align with the Democratic party, because it is clear with the elevation of our VP that the Democratic party will always deliver representation over truth and justice.



Harris speaking at a Democratic Party Convention. Photo by Gage Skidmore/Flickr

FROM OTHELLO TO BATWOMAN: REPRESENTATION MATTERS

by Nicholas Felix - Contributing Writer



Javicia Leslie as the new Batwoman. Fair use of CW Network.

The new season of the television show Batwoman brings a huge change as the character is now portrayed by a Black, lesbian, and Jewish actress, Javicia Leslie. Unfortunately, Leslie and the production team have received racial and hate comments from online trolls.

Curiously though, where was this strong negativity when white actors played Black, Latinx, Asian and other characters of non-white races?

Systemic racism and bias are not new to the film and TV industry or the pub-

lic for that matter. In the earlier years of acting it has been overlooked or easily tolerated when the matter pertained to white performers playing roles such as Othello or various characters in West Side Story, just to name a couple.

White actors and actresses were overlooked or easily forgiven for playing roles that were for people of color. Now, people of color are being scrutinized by audiences and fans for their portrayals of white-written characters despite the claims for more diversity in the industry.

A 2017 study by the University of Southern California has found that over 700 popular films have included white actors playing characters that were supposed to be people of color.

In 2001, for example, the actress Jennifer Connelly starred in a 2001 film, "A Beautiful Mind" based on the life of the mathematician, John Nash, as his wife Alicia. However, Connelly is a white actress who played the role of a real-life Latina, but there no racial concerns. She later won an Academy Award for best supporting actress for role.

Angelina Jolie, also a white actress, portrayed the role of Marianne Peal in 2007's "A Mighty Heart." The film tells the true story of Pearl who was a French and Afro-Cuban journalist whose husband was killed in Pakistan. This role sparked debate and curiosity on modern Black face, but it died down. Many also wondered if this was reverse racism.

Pearl defended Jolie on the role, saying "This is a story of a group of individuals."

Ridely Scott's film "Exodus: Gods & Kings" became among the successful films in 2014 despite him casting white actors as characters from the Bible who historically were Egyptian and African. People on social media proposed the idea to boycott the film.

However, none of these actors, actresses, and production teams received the same amount of racial criticism as Batwoman.

This situation sheds light on how casting operates in the industry. Non-traditional casting is a fascinating component to systemic racism and bias. Also known as color-blind casting, the terms denote the ongoing racial ignorance through entertainment such as ethnic misrepresentation. Strangely though, this type of casting has opened doors for varieties of diverse actors and actresses who played non-traditional roles.



Javicia Leslie as the new Batwoman. Fair use of CW Network.

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Etrita Abdullahu. Photo by Illir Rizaj.

Sakkers said, “Even though the focus is ballet, the program makes you a well-rounded dancer, which is really important, as it is hard to find a dance company in which you will only ever dance one style.”

About the instruction itself, Ehlinger said, “The teachers put in their all to teach us everything they have learned in life, and I think that is so awesome. These teachers are passing down their knowledge to us and it is so exciting to know that we can make it, just as they did.”

Throughout the pandemic, however, the dance community admits to facing challenges. Ehlinger is envisioning a future as a dance instructor and the owner of a dance studio of her own.

She acknowledges the importance of online learning and pre-dance tech-

niques, “Through a computer, it is very hard to comprehend different things, and I think I have learned different ways to make it easier. (...) One technique I have dedicated more time to is stretching. Stretching before and after class is super important for your muscles so you don’t end up tearing something or hurting yourself.”

Abdullahu addresses the continuing changes and how they have taken them in stride, “We’ve been dancing in our living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens. We’ve gone from big spaces that we share with our friends and teachers to dancing in very confined spaces all by ourselves. It has been tough to keep dancing and to keep the motivation up when there are so many limitations, but we have had to remind ourselves to do our best with what we have.”

Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Aaron Aska said the groundbreaking for the Performing Arts Center and Music, Dance, and Theatre building will begin in Summer 2021.



Gerald Arpino. Fair use of Britannica.com



Joffrey Ballet School in Manhattan. Photo by Yair Haklai/Wikimedia Commons

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FROM OTHELLO TO BATWOMAN: REPRESENTATION MATTERS



Visionary painting of Othello. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Non-traditional casting has become a non-stop feat of Hollywood, implemented by directors, producers, and management of the acting industry. And they all have slowly picked up on being more racially sensitive and aware while establishing zero tolerance rules in the workplace for equal opportunity and fair game for actors to audition for.

The last six years of non-traditional casting within fictional, fantasy and comic book roles have made strong impacts of representation for people of color. In the 2015 “Fantastic Four” reboot, Michael B. Jordan was the first Black actor to portray Marvel Comics’ Human

Torch, a Caucasian character.

Numerous people on social media and YouTube protested the news with comments like “The Human Torch can’t be Black”, “Why is Hollywood trying to be woke?”, a popular public line “Go Woke Go Broke”, and the list goes on.

This casting even attracted worse toxic individuals online, some even sent the director (Josh Tank) death threats for casting Jordan as the Human Torch, even though Stan Lee, the creator of the character emailed Jordan that he was happy with the decision and gave him his blessings, (Stan Lee 1922-2018).

Also in 2015, the Broadway play, “Harry Potter and The Cursed Child” casted Noma Dumezweni, an award-winning Black actress, to play a grown-up Hermione Granger and yes you guessed it, she was written as a British white character.

The cast and crew received racist comments and death threats for having a Black actress play a white character. The author, J.K. Rowling, strongly supported and defended Noma for playing the role phenomenally and was outraged for how people were treating her.

In the current situation, Ruby Rose, the former Batwoman, gave Leslie her best wishes for the role despite the media criticism. Rose had stepped down from the series due to a medical injury during one of the action performances.

To the readers I pose this question to you: What matters more? Equal Opportunity or Representation? Is it possible to balance both in this industry that has the power to inspire equality as well incite debate and conflict among our respective communities?

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