

# Dance Teacher®

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JUNE 2017

## STAGE PRESENCE

Begins in the  
Classroom

## Mark DeGarmo

Taking Outreach  
to New Levels

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Photo by Rachel Papo



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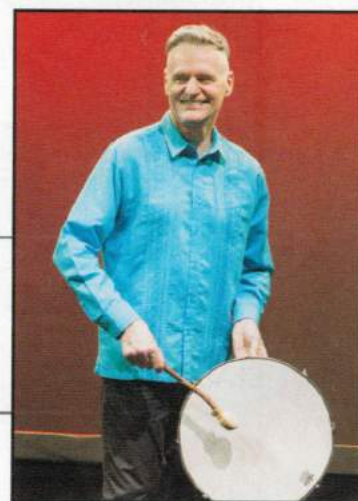
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**Mark DeGarmo**  
Photographed by Rachel Papo  
Grooming by Angela Huff





## Paying Attention

**F**or the cover shoot this month, Mark DeGarmo invited us to observe a professional-development session with four teaching artists who work with children in New York City public schools. What a privilege it was to watch these four demonstrate the process they use with their students. While DeGarmo kept the beat with a drum and called out movement suggestions, the dancers explored variations in level, pattern and energy. It's the kind of sustained improvisation that requires focus and problem-solving ability, and vulnerability—a willingness to be seen while “in process.”

Stopping to reflect for a moment, DeGarmo talked about the significance of “giving witness.” Sometimes, he said, the act of observing a child as he dances is powerful because it's the only time that child feels really seen. In “Giving Witness” (page 36), Joseph Carman reports on how DeGarmo grew the concept of artist outreach into a long-term in-school residency with measurable results.

DeGarmo was referring to an at-risk child, but it struck me that giving witness is something all dance teachers do. The attention we pay each dancer is a central component of dance training. And it contributes to the nurturing environment of a dance studio.

That nurturing is enhanced by the kind of physical space we maintain. How long has it been since your last studio upgrade? For our “Special Section: Studio Equipment” (page 45), we talked with six studio owners who've recently completed renovation projects. Whether their spaces were bursting at the seams (or their vinyl floors were!) or simply in need of an update, they did the necessary research, weighed pros and cons—and told us how much time and money they spent.

This month, we also feature one of our favorite kinesiology experts, Deborah Vogel. Not only did she outline a basic approach to build core strength (“Finding Core Stability,” page 60), she'll now be writing a regular column for dance-teacher.com. Starting this month, you can send your questions and concerns about anatomy, alignment, conditioning and other elements of movement science to [askdeb@dancemedia.com](mailto:askdeb@dancemedia.com). Look for her advice online in “Ask Deb” at [dance-teacher.com](http://dance-teacher.com).



*Karen Hildebrand*

KAREN HILDEBRAND  
EDITOR IN CHIEF



DeGarmo and teaching artists  
Mary Seidman, Chris Odo,  
Kathryn Appleby and Susan  
Thomasson





## DANCE TEACHER VIDEO OF THE MONTH

### Congratulations to **April Henehan**, our Editors' Choice for the *Dance Teacher* Video of the Month!

In a poignant contemporary piece titled *Les Voix*, choreographer April Henehan captures the struggles experienced by people with schizophrenia. The video begins with a quote by St. Augustine, "There cannot be good without evil; everything in existence must coexist in a sort of balance or symmetry." The first soloist featured, Montserrat Roberts, who is currently pursuing her BFA at Pace University, shows this duality.

While working on a psychology thesis paper about coping mechanisms that victims of abuse deal with, Henehan, who

is now on faculty with the dance department at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Florida, found inspiration to create a series of three dances. Filmed in Florida at Britney Boyd Dance Company, the series was then entered as a research submission. The young dancers featured attended one rehearsal, where the choreography was set and filmed within 165 minutes. "Some [victims] detach from reality, and schizophrenia was a topic within the research that resonated the most for *Les Voix*, meaning 'voices,' which became the first video of the series," says Henehan. Through her choreography, she wants to "represent the conflict and internal struggle of the disease," she says. —Betsy Farber



To see the video, go to [dancemediacom/v/13362](http://dancemediacom/v/13362).

**Want to build buzz about your studio, workshop or class?** Posting videos to the *Dance Teacher* Video of the Month Contest is quick, easy and free. If your video is selected as Editors' Choice, you'll be featured on this page, in *DT*'s newsletter and on our web and social-media pages! Visit [dancemediacom](http://dancemediacom) to share your videos and vote for your favorites.

## THIS MONTH ON DANCE-TEACHER.COM

➔ **VIDEO!** Karen Arceneaux teaches a Horton lateral T. (See page 50.)

➔ **ONLINE!** Visit [dance-teacher.com](http://dance-teacher.com) and check out the new "Ask Deb" column for anatomy and kinesiology advice from expert Deborah Vogel.

➔ **CAN'T GET ENOUGH *DT*?** Sign up for our free newsletter for access to exclusive interviews, giveaways and more!



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## COVER FLASHBACK

### 10 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH...

Retired Paul Taylor dancer **Heather Berest** joined her mother **Olga Berest**, owner of Berest Dance Center in Port Washington, a studio nurturing the community—at that point—for 30 years. Olga was thrilled to have her daughter, once described by a dance critic as "otherworldly," on board. "I would love for the Berest to become a New York City alternative, to be attended by professionals and aspiring professionals, particularly for modern," said Olga. "But [Heather's] vision is not up to me. I'm already living my dream—she's by my side."

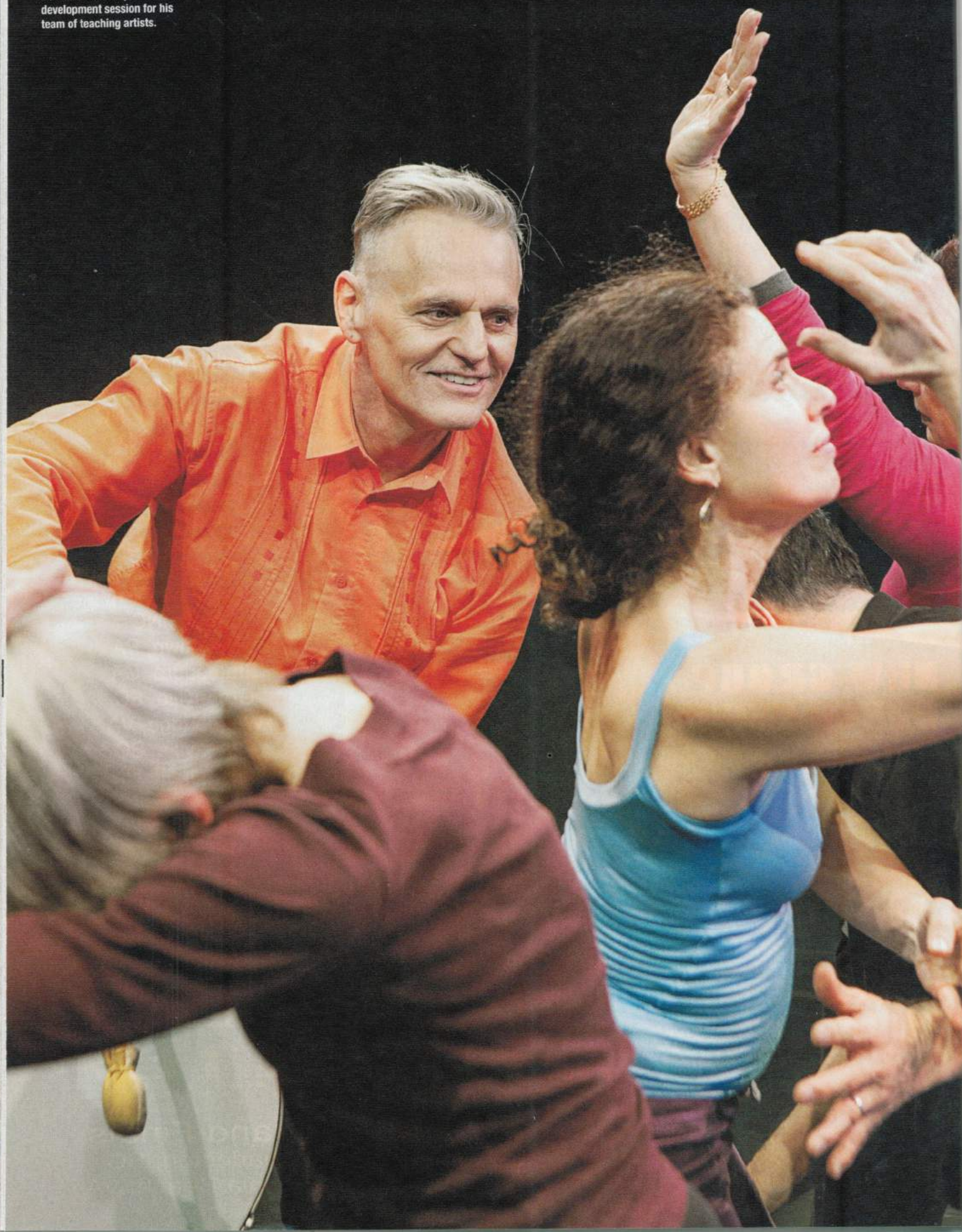


Photo by Nathan Sayers. Hair and makeup by Mia Sarazen

Stay in touch! Visit [dance-teacher.com](http://dance-teacher.com) or e-mail letters to the editor to [bfarber@dancemediacom](mailto:bfarber@dancemediacom).



DeGarmo leads a professional development session for his team of teaching artists.





# GIVING WITNESS

MARK DEGARMO CELEBRATES 30 YEARS OF RUNNING  
A MODEL PUBLIC-SCHOOL DANCE PROGRAM.

BY JOSEPH CARMAN

When Mark DeGarmo enrolled in The Juilliard School's Dance Division, he asked Martha Hill if a degree would help him get a job. The indomitable founder and then-director of the program gave him advice dancers are well-accustomed to hearing: "Well, dear, you'll always be able to teach."

DeGarmo took her words to heart and set out to create parallel careers from the very beginning. "I always had a dual path of teaching and choreography," he says. At the same time as Mark DeGarmo Dance (MDD) embarked on 28 international tours in 12 countries, the company has also partnered with New York City schools to provide programs for kids struggling in some of the toughest socioeconomic conditions. What they've learned from three decades in classrooms with these kids has set MDD apart as a model for dance education.

Today, MDD's education staff consists of a director and four faculty members who work with five NYC preK-5 schools on the Lower East Side and in Brooklyn. Teaching artists lead a 16-week session of classes with a performance at the end. Curriculum is linked with the NYC Department of Education *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Dance*, which DeGarmo helped develop.

## Finding the Right Teaching Model

In 2015, the lanky choreographer accepted the Martha Hill Foundation's mid-career award in recognition of his pioneering work. He is particularly earnest when he speaks about the need for more dance education: "A lot of the work we see even today comes out of a model where you really are trying to get people to your theater. Or the dance-company model where you're out on tour, and you want to teach master classes as an add-on benefit for earned income."



Students of  
P.S. 142, Amalia  
Castro School,  
perform in a recital.



"What dance does for this population of kids is to create a strong sense of self and self-esteem."

—MARY SEIDMAN,  
TEACHING ARTIST

"I worked for seven arts organizations as a teaching artist before moving full force to the model I'm working with now," he says, looking back. He often saw teachers applying pedagogical methods developed in dance studios or conservatories that were, he says, "dropped into a Title I preK-5 elementary school with the array of learning-challenged abilities and disabilities we routinely face there. It's destined to perpetuate the idea that dance isn't applicable to the general population—that it's elitist, and that we're sort of tone-deaf to the needs of education as a field."

He goes on to say, "The flip side is we sometimes have people who become certified dance teachers, who've never experienced professional performance or worked at a high enough level on their own technical work. You're teaching locomotor skills, but you really can't demonstrate a skip or a gallop. You haven't had musical training; you don't know how to improvise effectively or choreograph—a lot of skills that a really expert dance educator needs."

### **Inquiry-Based Learning**

"A lot of the work we do is problem-solving-based or inquiry-based—trying to engage the kids and get them



excited," DeGarmo says. He describes one class project to study Alvin Ailey's signature work, *Revelations*. Twenty kids were selected to represent the five classes (100 students) to look at original source material at the Lincoln Center Library for Performing Arts. "We went on a field trip to The Ailey Center and saw the boardroom with the Presidential Medal of Freedom," he says. "There are so many directions that an educator can take."

MDD's approach prioritizes a democratic process in the classroom—bolstered by improvisation and input from the students—so that everyone's voice is heard as part of the community. For example, the students take turns in a circle leading and following the spontaneous creation of movement, and they are encouraged to observe the other



DeGarmo maintains an active performance career. Here, he and Luis Gabriel Zaragoza perform in *Las Fridas*, DeGarmo's work about the life of Frida Kahlo.



students' work in supportive ways. Additionally, says DeGarmo, "they utilize age-appropriate discourse using multiple perspectives to analyze and resolve a movement, behavioral or other challenge." The instructors place some focus on dance skills, "although we don't teach them in a way that you might do effectively in studio practice," he adds. Lessons are linked to the academic curriculum; improvisation is used to foster creativity and imagination; journaling and creative writing based on the students' experiences are also instrumental.

Mary Seidman, a choreographer, company director and educator who has taught for the Mark Morris Dance Center for 15 years, joined MDD as a teaching artist last October. "I think what dance does for this population of kids is to create a stronger sense of self and self-esteem," she says. "We're working a lot with social and emotional issues that children bring to the situation. Dance works so beautifully because it's so community-oriented." The support that the students get in a dance class gives them the experience of creating a more conscious body image and an awareness of themselves in space and in the world.

Lesson plans vary for different age groups. For the preK kids for instance, she usually reads a story, and the students enact it. "Recently we acted out a snowfall. We brought little prop snowballs and had a snowball fight," she says.

The fifth-graders might re-create scenes from their American-history studies, often creating frozen tableaux using ideas about prejudice and resistance through issues such as slavery and the Native American struggle. In one class, a teaching artist with expertise in kuku, a West

African circle-dance tradition, contrasted that genre with the Japanese bon dance, a Buddhist custom to honor the spirits of ancestors.

### Funding

Early on, DeGarmo identified the not-for-profit environment as a viable option. He set up MDD with the help of Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and, especially, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, which has been essential to achieving his education goals.

Yet he cautions, "Don't go lightly into assuming a not-for-profit mantle." The structure requires rigorous compliance with IRS regulations, and grant writing, in particular, is a laborious effort. "People think it's so easy: Write a grant and get the money," he says. He recommends starting with fiscal sponsorship, a common structure where you operate under the financial umbrella of a separate nonprofit organization.

### Rewards and Results

There are obvious challenges teaching at-risk students in underfunded public schools in the third-most-segregated school system in a major U.S. city. Not the least of these is holding classes in auditoriums while three other schools simultaneously share the space. Nonetheless, says Seidman, "I do a lot of creative work with them, where they have to problem-solve and make up dances. When you see children really digging in and wanting to figure it out, that's the most rewarding thing. The reward is in realizing you have



DeGarmo's approach prioritizes a democratic process in the classroom: Everyone's voice is heard as part of the community.



done a good job of creating a motivation and a dream in a child, that they didn't even know they had."

DeGarmo's program has produced noticeable results. Through a grant, an NYU sociology professor conducted a three-year study with DeGarmo's students and a control group. DeGarmo's students showed increases in math scores compared to the control. The quality and quantity of writing in their journals was also strengthened, and their classroom behavior improved. Johns Hopkins University School of Education will soon release its results of a long-term study that compared test scores in reading in four public schools.

Isaiah Robertson, a 10-year-old in the fifth grade at P.S. 15 on the Lower East Side, began dance classes with Seidman last January. He's already absorbed some life lessons about his work ethic and maneuvering through life. "I learned it's OK to mess up in dance, because if you keep going, nobody will notice it," he says. "And showing 100

percent effort is good for you." One of his assignments was to read one of R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* books, write a summary of it and create movement based on what he had read.

"We're not going to have a field of contemporary or modern dance in 20 more years, if we don't get another generation as fired up about this as we were," says DeGarmo, who continues to choreograph and perform with his company of professional dancers. "I would encourage my colleagues, if you have an inkling, go for it. Be bold, try out things, make mistakes—we're all human. There's a deep commitment to social justice behind all of this to bring forward the voices of the unheard. We're very proud of that. I do hope other colleagues will take up the cause and be part of the inter-cultural community." **DT**

*Joseph Carman is a former dancer with American Ballet Theatre and a longtime contributor to Dance Teacher.*