

# FOOTWORK MEETS FINANCE

## Nancy MacMillan



On stage, in the studio, or behind the scenes, Nancy MacMillan loves to catch a glimpse of as much dance she can. "The combination of music, athleticism, and grace is such a joyful thing to see," says Nancy. Her passion began more than 25 years ago when, shoulder to shoulder with other parents, Nancy peered through the window of Princeton Ballet's studio, watching her children do pirouettes, pliés, glissades, and jétés. Her children may have long ago hung up their own tights, but Nancy's passion for the art has only grown, blossoming into a broader, more cultivated appreciation for dance in all its forms.

With this evolution, her current involvement with Career Transition For Dancers seems to be a natural extension of her own enthusiasm: for the dancers she has come to respect and admire so much, what happens next? The question is one that CTFD uniquely tackles, and Nancy's financial and fundraising background and experience puts her in a position to be able to help take on the question.

"People don't think about these problems – that a dancer can have a career-ending injury at age 28 even though they were preparing to dance until they were 42. With the focus and intensity that a dancer needs to 'make it' and have a good career, the dancers themselves often don't think of these things," says Nancy. "What a great service, to inform and counsel them while they're still having their career and give them some of the means to discover for themselves what's next on their life path."

In a unique way, CTFD combines a present-day enthusiasm for dance with a future-thinking practicality, focused on education through counseling and grants. And this is where Nancy's yin-and-yang of creative interest and financial and fundraising know-how is crucial.

A native New Yorker, Nancy possesses a seemingly boundless appreciation for the arts (you'll find her anywhere from Lincoln Center, catching City Ballet's latest to home watching Fred Astaire films), which has extended to a desire to support organizations with an artistic, creative focus. At the same time, she is what you might call fiscally savvy. With Masters degrees in both Finance and Economics, Nancy's contribution to the business and non-profit worlds extends over decades – for the last 16 years she has been publisher of *Princeton Alumni Weekly* magazine, a volunteer for the Medical Center of Princeton, and more recently has served on the board of the Institute for Advanced Study, along with serving as Chair of the Board and Treasurer at American Repertory Ballet on and off for over 25 years, where she was first introduced to CTFD.

After spending so many years with the ballet, she couldn't help but get personally involved. "You get to meet dancers and you get to know them as people. You feel with them when they can't dance. Dance is a very different career because it's so emotional – to make a change is difficult."

As a CTFD board member, Nancy's particular expertise comes in handy with fundraising and financial work for the organization, but the work of non-profits is never easy. Unlike other business, the mission can only be served by relying on philanthropy. But, often, thoughts of future success can be overwhelmed by current ambition, rendering secondary the financial concerns that are central to any organization's survival.

"It is very important for non-profits to have people on their boards that will treat the organizations as a true business," says Nancy. CTFD may have a unique focus, but in today's scene – where non-profits everywhere face new, increasingly difficult challenges – even dance and education-centered thinking must include the pragmatic. Due to cut-backs in grants and the growth of non-profit organizations, there is more competition for people's charitable giving. So, to ensure a future, organizations like CTFD must be clear in stating their goals and provide evidence that they are accomplishing their mission. To this end, Nancy also stresses the importance of individual involvement, which she sees as the direction in which philanthropy is headed. "The future of non-profit lies in individual giving," she says – of time, money, and passion for the particular organization.

In this sense, CTFD is lucky to have a group of incredible board members who, like Nancy, have demonstrated their continued dedication to the organization and its clients. Having served on the Board of Directors, as well as several committees including the Executive, Finance, and Fundraising/Development, since 2004, Nancy is glad for the positive experience and grateful for the work of others who are armed with different, complementary skills.

The worst case, as Nancy sees it, is one that holds for both dancers and for non-profit organizations themselves: "...creating something wonderful, and then not be able to sustain it." In the case of CTFD, an organization with its eye optimistically on the future, it is her hope that success will continue to be found in the meeting of financial responsibility and a true love of dance and the dancer.

# Spotlight ON Michael Byars

*As a continued advocate for career transition awareness, Michael Byars encourages other dancers by sharing his personal story - transitioning from ballet to law.*

When Michael Byars, then a soloist with New York City Ballet, performed Balanchine's *Tarantella* in CTFD's annual gala 10 years ago, he had no idea that within the year he would find himself utilizing the services that the event was raising money for. In retrospect, Michael's second career path shared many similarities to his decision to pursue a career in ballet. But, at the time, his decision to transition from dance to law hardly seemed a foregone conclusion.

The son of two professional musicians - his mother, a clarinetist for the American Symphony under Leopold Stokowski, and his father, an oboist for the New York City Ballet orchestra - Michael grew up completely immersed in the performing arts. Having been exposed, so intimately, to this world of creativity and musical expression, young Michael perceived the ballet as a magical place. The wonderful productions of the New York City Ballet nourished Michael's youthful imagination, and this early exposure to ballet triggered his interest in becoming a dancer. At age eleven, with the encouragement of his parents and of George Balanchine, Michael enrolled in the School of American Ballet, the official school of the NYCB, to experience this magic in a new way.



Photo: Paul Konnik

Michael Byars in Peter Martin's *Les Gentilhommes*

In 1983, after nearly eight years of rigorous dance training at SAB, Michael was offered an apprenticeship with the NYCB. Michael's long-standing admiration and respect for his colleagues made his association with the company a special thrill and when the dancers asked him in 1989 to become the Dancers' Committee Chairperson, he was pleased and honored to be able to contribute, in a new way, to the profession he loved so much. Michael recruited company members to represent a cross section of company and asked the Committee members to look at the expiration of their collective bargaining agreement to examine new areas of concern. It was during this process that Michael first encountered the idea of career transition.

After coming across an essay in the *Dance/USA Journal*, which illustrated sobering and candid details on ending dance careers, Michael and the committee decided to address these issues in their new contract. Michael learned about CTFD during negotiations and began advocating its services. While focusing on the financial, educational and emotional preparation for the career transitions of other dancers, Michael determined to do something for himself and go back to school part-time once the contract negotiations concluded.

In the fall of 1990, Michael decided to take courses in his new area of interest. He first signed up for a labor law course at a joint labor studies program of Cornell University and Empire State College. The next summer, Michael began taking liberal arts courses at Fordham University where some of his colleagues were already enrolled. Fordham was very accommodating to NYCB dancers' schedules; and since the company had a stable presence in New York, Michael and his colleagues were able to attend classes consistently. Michael continued to juggle his dance career and his schoolwork for the next 5 ½ years, and received his bachelor's degree from Fordham and a certificate in labor relations from the Empire/Cornell program in 1996.

While in school, Michael weighed the possibility of remaining in the dance world. Michael taught in ballet programs at SAB, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and the Banff Centre in Canada. However, he began to realize his increasing comfort with the advocate's role as his colleagues continued to approach him for advice outside the context of contract negotiations. With the help of CTFD counselor and former Broadway dancer Suzie Jary, Michael began more seriously to investigate a career in law, took the LSAT and applied to law schools. "[Suzie] was highly qualified and very helpful, having been through transition herself." After being offered a generous scholarship package from NYU School of Law, and obtaining an additional scholarship from CTFD, Michael began his journey towards a law degree. Thus Michael took control of his own transition and successfully so, receiving his law degree and passing the bar exams for New York and Massachusetts in 2000.

After receiving his law degree, Michael spent a year as a litigator in private practice, and then clerked for Judge Reena Raggi and Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw. Today, as an associate attorney at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton and new dad – Michael is very satisfied with the life he has created for himself. "I earned my college degree while I was dancing, I identified something that was of interest to me, and I got some great opportunities. Now I work in a new challenging and fulfilling professional environment. It's a situation I would wish for every dancer facing transition." Realizing the successful outcome of the investments he made in an education outside of dance, Michael urges others to consider doing the same. "Dancers are smart people... and there's a lot of talent out there onstage that is not only applicable to dance."

Michael emphasizes that the costs of transition should not be borne exclusively by the transitioning dancer. He encourages the dance community to become more assertive about addressing these concerns: "these issues should be confronted before, during and after the performing phase of one's involvement in dance." This is sage advice from someone who has gone through this difficult transition himself, and who continues to be an advocate for career transition awareness.



"Enjoying downtime with his 7-month-old son, Samuel, in a photo taken by Michael's wife and Samuel's mother, Rachael Venner."