

**Live Online Chat with Gerard Charles, Artistic Director of the RAD
Friday, 1st May 2020, 11 o'clock CET**

This is a summary of the live online chat conducted on the 1st May 2020, in lieu of the cancelled event, 100 Years of the Royal Academy of Dance, in Berlin. Please note that the wording in this document does not precisely match those spoken at the time but is instead intended to provide a summary of the points discussed. Photo by David Tett.

In his introduction, Gerard touches on key moments in his career before becoming Artistic Director of the RAD - from his time first as a professional dancer at the Ballet International, Milwaukee Ballet and BalletMet, then as Education Director for BalletMet and Ballet Master for BalletMet and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, before his role as Artistic Director of BalletMet and Director of Artistic Operations at Joffrey Ballet.



The following questions were asked by individual participants of the live chat:

Now that the RAD have the Silver Swans™ and the Dance for Lifelong Wellbeing research, do you have plans going forward to adapt and evolve classical ballet training further, and perhaps the examinations process, to make it a really inclusive activity and modality, as well as more accessible? How can we use ballet specifically, not just free movement, as a healing tool?

Gerard Charles: *First, we want to reinforce and strengthen existing Silver Swans offerings. We also want to talk to teachers to find out what resources, knowledge and skills they need to deliver the existing dance teaching material. Considering the success of “Project B”, we want to find a way to translate the concept of this programme to other groups, not just boys. We are hoping to develop resources for teachers to help them enable everyone in their class to feel welcome and at home. This would include unconscious biases such as the language we use, to colours we decorate with and descriptions of movements. It is about how to be more open in your welcome to others.*

It is important to us to develop resources to help teachers to reach students who may want to dance ballet but are hindered for a particular reason, as well as to reach those people who may not yet know they want to dance ballet.

My Silver Swans™ dancers, most of whom have time and money, and some of whom are somewhat socially isolated, would love to travel to meet other Silver Swans™ dancers.

Gerard Charles: *A “flock gathering” of Silver Swans™ either here in London or in Germany sounds like a great suggestion. Organising community events are, in general, a good idea. I welcome further such suggestions for training for teachers and events like these – please do share them with us.*

Dance teaching can be a lonely profession. I think it is good for us to come together online, in the future, too.

Gerard Charles: *Everyone is indeed facing uncertainty and it is my intent to do what I can to support all our teachers. Artistic expression is of value even more in these stressful times. In times of financial crisis, in my experience, the last thing to be cut is dance class because it provides a sense of normality as well as an emotional, artistic means of expression for a child or adult. We are working for people who are emotionally connected to what we do – we must, therefore, stay hopeful and stay connected in any way we can.*

Could you tell us more about the process of filming of exams?

Gerard Charles: *The RAD has substituted filming exams with examinations tours in the past, such as during the SARS outbreak. For the foreseeable year, we are looking into the filming of exams. Measures to ensure fairness include the requirement to film the whole exam in one piece and having the examiner watch the filmed exam in one go, to match the experience of a face-to-face exam closely. We will be publishing more information on the filming of exams soon.*

How can schools use the average exam results as an indicator of the standard, to encourage students to sign up for their school? Can we talk to examiners after the exam?

Gerard Charles: *Some schools publish their average exam results. As a parent or prospective student of a dance school, you have to be careful when looking at a school's average exam results though, as it may be that only the best students registered for exams. The question is, how do we recognise good teachers? This cannot be based purely on exam results. So much depends on where the student begins and what they have learnt along the way, which cannot be known in a one off event like an exam. The reason why exams were introduced by the RAD was to be able to give feedback to teachers, to see how well they were teaching but since then is much more an assessment of the student. We recognize the need for teachers to get feedback and so we are looking at ways to achieve that either through written comments or some form of interaction with the RAD in the future.*

Practical Teaching Tips from Gerard Charles

With the following two questions raised by the RAD team in Berlin, Gerard Charles provided participants with practical teaching tips.

How can teachers convey their class online successfully? How can they engage with their students, and inspire and motivate them via a screen?

Gerard Charles: *Teaching online is obviously not the same as teaching in person. You have more time if the class is prerecorded and you cannot give live feedback and that allows you to really focus on one thing. It is important to keep the human connection even in a live online lesson. There may also be more conversation in comparison to a normal class in the studio. One strategy could be to share prerecorded lessons as well as a live online chat once a week or so.*

How can teachers incorporate the development of musicality into their lesson?

Gerard Charles: *It is important for students to understand that a movement is not carried out the same in every setting i.e. to every piece of music. A student must learn to ask themselves how to use the beats / half beats in the music to express the transitions that make up a movement. Teach them really to experiment with the music themselves, to listen to the time signature in the music. You can help them to this in their exercises by changing to a piece of music with a different key signature and thus different accent placements. Or let them listen to the music before dancing to connect their minds to the movements. Living with the music is very important. I try to demonstrate using the rhythm, rather than the count, so that my students get a sense of what is happening in the music.*

The RAD team in Berlin would like to thank Gerard Charles for his practical tips and insightful responses to participants' questions. We look forward to meeting Gerard in person in the future!