

Finding THE SILVER LINING

A dancer finds an unexpected career path.

BY MELANIE REMBRANDT

Like many little girls, Megan Brunke dreamed of becoming a classical ballerina. She studied diligently until, at age 16, she developed a severe case of adrenal exhaustion and was forced to stop dancing. Her dreams were shattered. But now, thanks to a degree in dance from Wayne State University, she's not only choreographing and performing, but working on video and film projects.

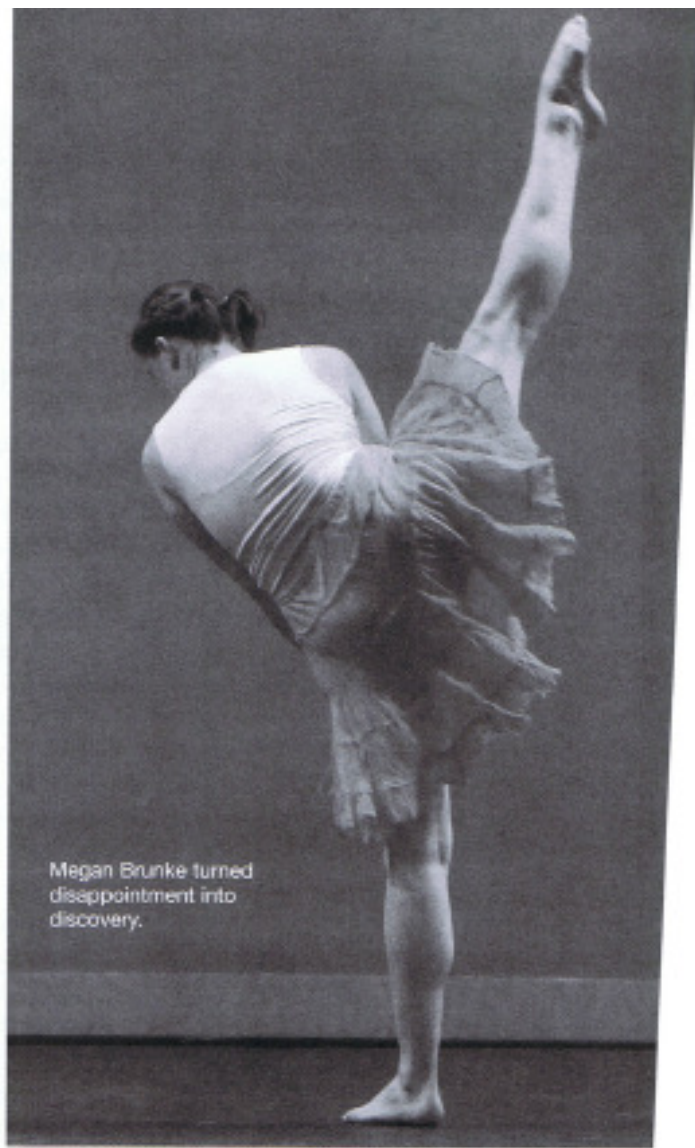
Brunke struggled with her illness for more than a year. As her health improved, she scrambled to catch up on schoolwork and managed to graduate on time and with honors. But she wasn't as excited as she might have been when she earned a prestigious, Presidential Scholarship to WSU's Maggie Allesee Department of Dance in Detroit.

"I felt very negative about entering a modern dance program," she says. "But it was close to my home and I won a full scholarship. I made the best of it." Little did she know that she would discover an under-explored facet of dance that would give her a competitive edge at graduation.

"My first year of college, I cried myself to sleep because you had to dance barefoot in modern class," says Brunke. "But my professors helped me understand modern dance and showed me how to combine it with technology to make my own rules and explore new ways of expressing myself."

At WSU, students learn technique, choreography, and performance. But they also take courses in website, sound, and lighting design, stage management, video editing, and dance documentation. First, Brunke learned how to create an online dance portfolio and website so she could effectively market herself. Then, she investigated advanced technologies in performance.

Doug Risner, WSU dance chair, explains that she focused on telematics—presenting dance works using computers and Internet 2 technologies over online networks. "At our telematic studio, she experimented with touch-point sensors and



Megan Brunke turned disappointment into discovery.

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—MEGAN BRUNKE

various sound and video software programs," he says. WSU's Association for Dance and Performance Telematics (ADaPT) membership allowed her to collaborate with students as far away as Arizona and England to create combinations of live and taped dance works.

"Digital dance is very different from stage work," says Brunke. "You create in terms of visuals, framing, and imposition rather than in terms of movement."

When it came time to graduate, Brunke found herself with a rolodex of useful contacts. Her ADaPT affiliation has led to

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work on music videos. And word has spread in the local entertainment community that not only is she a talented dancer and choreographer, but she can interact with technicians. "My digital dance education has gotten me a lot of work that I never expected to get," she says, "because I can speak the jargon, and contribute to the conversation without feeling alienated." Her role is often to help maintain the original look and feel of a dance piece as it goes through the film or video editing and production process. "I'm valuable because I bring something that most video and film technicians know nothing about—dance," she says. "They need a dancer who

understands what they're doing."

In addition, Brunke is now an adjunct faculty member at WSU and oversees the student modern dance company. She has choreographed for Michigan Ballet Theatre, Sherry's Academy of Dance, and other local dance organizations. "I'm involved in so many different dance projects I never thought possible and am hired to put a new spin on things," says Megan. "My brain is constantly, happily working!" ❖

Melanie Rembrandt is a dancer and writer in Howell, Michigan. She is also the owner of Rembrandt Communications, LLC.

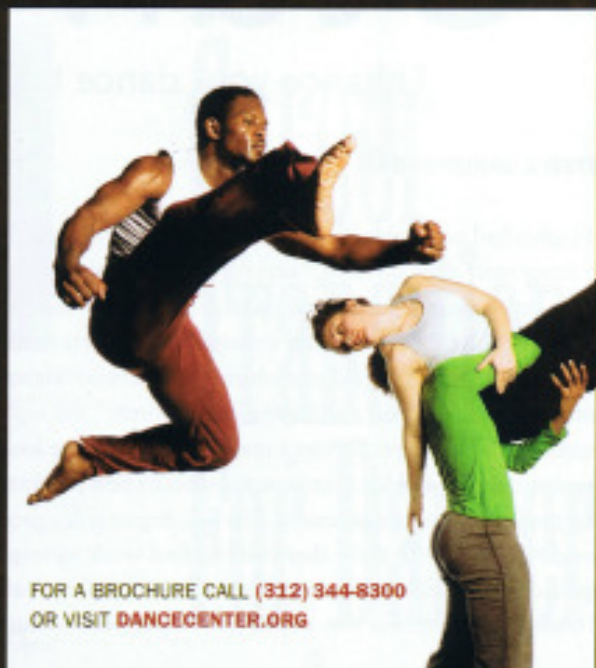


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