

Fleming Halby Exchange 2014  
PNB student: Nicole Rizzitano  
Evaluation

Upon hearing the news that I was chosen to participate in the Flemming Halby Dance Student Exchange program I was beyond thrilled. I had heard of this exchange program when I became a Professional Division student at Pacific Northwest Ballet School in 2013 and I had only hoped that I would be given this opportunity to participate. I have never traveled abroad before this program, so I was incredibly excited to be in a whole new atmosphere. I would say that I didn't really apply, but I did express my interest when I was told about the exchange program. I wanted to see and learn a whole new style of dance that I have never been exposed to. My expectations were set pretty high knowing the caliber of dance at the Royal Danish Ballet School. My expectation was to get a lot of individual attention and grow a lot as a dancer. With the small amount of apprentices at the school and the small amount of exchange students chosen, the opportunity of one on one with teachers was promising. Needless to say, I was very excited to go to Copenhagen.

When I began classes at the Royal Danish Ballet School it was actually quite challenging. I would take company class and then apprentice class in the afternoon followed by a variations class. This schedule lasted the duration of the three weeks that I was there and I had one day off on Sunday. The instruction there was amazing. It was very detailed orientated and it was always given with the intention of making you a better dancer. The instruction varied from Balanchine technique, Bournonville technique, and Classical technique throughout the three weeks. I loved the versatility of the classes because it taught you to change your movement and style throughout the day. Versatility is essential when you are dancing professionally in a company. That is what I loved most about the program. Although most parts of the training were good, one thing I did not particularly was dancing in a small space with a lot of people. We were taking company class every morning with a lot of people in a pretty small space. This made dancing to your full ability difficult at times. However, I learned to adjust and began to get used to it.

During my time in Copenhagen I stayed at the dorms provided by the Royal Danish Ballet School to the students that do not live in Copenhagen. The housing arrangements were great. Everything there ran so smoothly whether it was making breakfast for yourself in the morning to doing chores like laundry or washing dishes. Everyone in the dorms was eager to help in every way they could. They were also very kind and understanding to the exchange students and always tried to include us in their conversations. I would not recommend any changes to the housing arrangements. It was truly wonderful and a great place to spend the three weeks.

Adjusting to the culture was actually one of the more interesting aspects of the whole trip. To me, ballet is a universal language so it is easier to adapt to. In other words, the cultural and social aspects of the exchange were a lot harder for me to get used to than the training. While was preparing to go to Copenhagen I was not thinking so much about the cultural differences I might face. So they amount of

differences there was actually came as a surprise. A huge cultural difference was how honest everyone was. Everyone was treated fairly and with the utmost respect. I also noticed that people there are in much less of a hurry than they are in America. I guess I should not have been surprised but it was weird trying to get used to it. Although it was a challenge to get used to the culture differences I really loved the relaxing atmosphere. Everyone is riding bikes and sitting in café's and enjoying life day by day while in America we tend to speed through the day and not enjoy the little things life has to offer. What I liked least about the country was the lack of English translation. It was so difficult to figure things out by yourself especially in the airport. However, if you asked a passing stranger to help you figure out something they would gladly help. Most of them spoke English, which made up for lack of signs.

Before going on the exchange I was a little confused about certain things. I was not one hundred percent sure on where I would be staying or what my schedule may be like. When I got there, it was actually really difficult to buy a metro ticket and find the stop I needed to go to. Finally arriving at the stop, I walked around for twenty minutes trying to find the dorms. It turns out the building was under construction, so I didn't recognize which one it was. However when I finally got inside and got settled, everything was further explained. We got a tour of the theatre, told our schedule and rules, and what was expected of us. So I think if anything could be improved I think maybe a little more communication before the program begins to give you an idea of where you need to go and what you should bring. I think that would be helpful to future students.

Choosing a student to go on the exchange seems to be a difficult task because they have to have certain qualities. I think a student that is best suited for this program is definitely one that is nearing the end of their time as a student and is almost ready to start dancing professionally. It is important in a program like this that you can keep up with the things they are teaching you, which can be difficult at times. I also think that the student needs to be eager and ready to learn. Everything is sort of thrown at you and the teachers have very high expectations. They want you to succeed and grow even if you are there for a short time. My advice to future exchange students would be to go into class with an open mind and do everything they tell you. Every teacher has a different perspective and it may or may not work for you, but you won't know unless you try it. Work your hardest in every class and try to absorb as much information as possible. The knowledge the teachers have greatly surpasses your own and they are so generous to share it with the students. Be grateful for them and grateful you were chosen to go on this exchange because it is an incredible experience.

Lastly I would like to share my thoughts overall of the experience. As it was shown in earlier paragraphs, my experience was in everyway positive. The quality of this program is outstanding and I could not be more grateful to have been given the opportunity. I felt that the program greatly exceeded my expectations. Immersing myself in their lifestyle for three short weeks was eye opening. Everything was different than it is in America and I loved it. I am not going to lie, at the end I was excited to get back to my normal routine in America. I was really missing talking to my parents and my friends back in Seattle. However I would not

have changed a single thing about my experience. Although some parts were challenging, socially and culturally, it was a great feeling when you learned to overcome those challenges. I am honored to have been chosen to participate in the Flemming Halby Dance Student Exchange. It was an experience that I will never forget.