

# MEET THE BOARD MEMBERS



**DANIELLE LAURION**

**1. Describe your background and career - where did you go to college, what degrees, and career roles?**

Dancers' careers tend to start early. I started dancing at 5 years old and voraciously acquired anything I could learn about dance as I grew up. I spent summers dancing at Gus Giordano's Jazz World Congress, the Fort Wayne Ballet's summer intensives, and various other dance camps around the country. By the time I graduated high school, I was dancing 6 days a week and splitting my time between a local studio and a professional company. I decided to go to undergrad at the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point. This allowed me to earn my BA in Dance and Secondary English Education. After dancing for some regional companies in the Midwest, I decided to teach English at Bellevue West High School (which brought me to Nebraska). While teaching there, I also coached the dance team at the high school and taught at various dance studios in Omaha. After 4 years, I left to start grad school in Chicago at Columbia College Chicago, earning my MA in Dance/Movement Therapy & Counseling and my GLCMA in Laban Movement Analysis. Upon returning to Omaha, I took on the roles of running the dance program at Omaha South High School, lead-teaching The Moving Company (modern dance company), becoming a part-time lecturer for UNO dance classes, and a dance/movement therapist at CHI Immanuel's Residential Treatment Facility for Kids and Adolescents. Now, I still run the dance program at Omaha South High School. I also have moved into the role of artistic director of The Moving Company and adjunct professor for UNO's dance courses. In addition, I am now the director for Reach for It, which is a movement group for older adults, and have joined the Nebraska Arts Council's Creative Aging Artists. Along the way, I got involved with various arts organizations including Nebraskans for the Arts (NFTA), Omaha Jitterbugs, and the National Dance Society (NDS). While on the board for all three for a time, I now serve as the student council co-chair for NDS and the VP of the education committee for NFTA. I will be stepping into the new position as President-Elect for NFTA this year.

## **2. Describe a meaningful teaching moment from your career.**

There have been so many meaningful moments throughout my teaching and therapy career. However, every year, I'm rejuvenated by the excitement of the first-year dance students coming off stage after their first recital. They always start so nervous, but after hearing the applause for all of their hard work, they are transformed and the confidence blossoms in them. I love knowing that I'm not just teaching my students dance skills, but I'm also teaching life skills through the modality of dance. If my students leave the program at South High feeling ready to face their next steps in life, I feel like I have been successful in my job. That keeps me coming back year after year.

## **3. What type of arts do you like to be involved in or arts events you continue to support?**

I'm a nerd for all kinds of art! While I spend most of my time dancing and choreographing, I recently started taking a visual art class for myself. Once a week, I let the world fall away as I draw or paint. Growing up, I played alto saxophone and loved singing in musicals. I wrote poetry and performed at spoken word events. I love being on a stage and have tried to do various theatrical productions throughout the years as well. Even in my downtime, I can't stop myself from crafting, cross-stitching or sewing costumes, and I've started the tradition of making my daughter's Halloween costume every year.

In the Omaha community, I'm a season ticket holder for the Broadway and Dance series at the Orpheum and enjoy attending all kinds of events that Omaha Performing Arts puts on. I also like to frequent the Omaha Symphony, Bluebarn Theater, Durham Museum, comedy/improv groups, any dance event, and various art exhibits around town. I'm truly down for any kind of arts experience because I love how it opens new viewpoints to the world we live in.

## **4. You are an advocate and proponent of dance education. Why is dance education so important in promoting self expression and the development of the whole child?**

I feel like I could write a novel on this, but I will try to be succinct... I'm ecstatic to see that dance education is starting to move away from the "old-school" mentality of breaking dancers down, physically and emotionally, to "prepare" them for a career in dance. I truly believe that dance education can be a catalyst for empowerment. As humans we all move, and we build relationships with our bodies throughout our lifetime. This means that we all have the capacity to dance. If we can put children into an environment that allows them to gain more body awareness, self-confidence, spatial awareness, creative problem-solving skills, compassion, self-expression, etc., then we are setting them up to have the durable skills they need for their future. A healthy dance education environment can do that. It allows students to find a variety of ways to communicate, to problem-solve, to be in relationship with others and themselves, to take feedback, to build work ethic, etc. Those aren't just dance skills, those are life skills that they can take with them anywhere they go after they leave my classroom. So, instead of making dance technique an impossible task that only an elite few are capable of, I advocate that praise, personalized feedback, group cohesion, and opportunities for self-assessment allow dance technique to be taught in a way that not only empowers the individual to have ownership of their bodies but also creates a collective learning process that pulls from the wisdom of everyone in the room. As I tell my students, "I may be the expert on the dance technique, but you are the experts of your own bodies." I want students, of any age, to understand that our internal wisdom has just as much right to be present in a dance class as the technical elements do. Then we can think of technique as a way to keep the body safe and supported while moving and not a way of punishing ourselves for the limitations of our physical being. I hope to see these ideals even more as time goes on and we realize that dance is for everyone.

**5. Please share anything else you would like - if you want to share anything about your family or meaningful experiences**

A quick shout-out to my family! I have the opportunity to do many amazing things because of their unending support and love. Thank you for putting up with my crazy schedule and creative fancies.