



FAMILY DANCE CLASS AT LUNA DANCE & CREATIVITY. PHOTO BY BECKY VILLASENOR, COURTESY LUNA DANCE & CREATIVITY.

Luna Dance & Creativity Encourages Young Students' Choreographic Voices



BY JULIA MARY REGISTER

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[Luna Dance & Creativity](#) (formerly Luna Dance Institute), a nonprofit organization based in Berkeley, California, is one of a kind. Founded by Patricia Reedy in 1992, Luna exists to bring creativity, equity, and community to every child's life through the art of dance. The institution accomplishes its mission through a myriad of ways—in-house studio classes, partnerships with K–12 public schools, parent–child programs for reunification in the welfare system, research and advocacy in the dance field, professional learning opportunities for educators around the globe, and more. Luna has reached over 500,000 children since its founding three decades ago, and it hopes to share the joy of dance with one million children in the next 30 years.

John-Mario Sevilla, Luna's director of development and operations, joined the organization after moving from New York, where he previously directed 92Y Harkness Dance Center's School of Dance and New York City Ballet's education department. During the

pandemic, he was ready to move to the West Coast and was drawn to Luna because of its progressive mission and dedication to dance advocacy. “It’s been very satisfying to be part of this conversation about dance, its power, and its relationship to community and social justice,” he says.

Dedicated to fostering creativity, Luna founded the Studio Lab program, which is the only choreography-centered children’s dance program in California. The program offers students as young as 3 (and continuing through teens and adults) the rare opportunity to explore dancemaking and develop their choreographic voices. None of Luna’s classes or curriculum teach specific dance techniques, such as Cecchetti or Horton, but, rather, through play and exploration students learn movement principles that encourage them to improvise, compose, and express. The curriculum is based on theories of cognitive growth, adapted to the children’s developmental needs, and incorporates the latest research in neuroscience, human-development theory, and culturally relevant and anti-racist pedagogy.



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In 2024, Luna reached a monumental moment of creating its first permanent space after relocating nine times in 30 years. The newly renovated \$4.5 million facility includes two dance studios, a library and research center, and an ADA-accessible elevator. The new space has allowed the organization to host more community events, hire more teaching artists, and build a creative research center for dance.

Dance Teacher spoke with Sevilla to find out his tips for prioritizing play and creativity in the classroom, and advocating for the importance of dance in the community.

Why is it important for dance educators to prioritize play?

We get a lot of students who love to dance and move, but they aren’t finding satisfaction in the traditional conservatory model. You have to believe that creativity is the focus and understand why that’s important. It’s the highest form of understanding. It’s an important skill that we all should have. There’s so much transferable knowledge that you can acquire through dance that has to be communicated. The understanding of oneself, discovering who you are to the fullest range possible, being empowered to make decisions and have agency, and sharing space with others.

What are you trying to accomplish with the Studio Lab program?

So many people say “I can’t dance” or “I’m not a dancer,” primarily because our cultural context says dance requires talent and specific training. At Studio Lab, we allow dance to become an inclusive activity for everyone. We don’t have any mirrors in our studios, we’re barefoot. You have to communicate that everyone is a dancer and has the capacity to move. Dance is a place for equity—everyone can participate. Dance is a place for diversity—it welcomes all kinds of bodies.



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How can other dance educators learn more about dance advocacy within their communities?

We don't have a formula here at Luna. That question itself is a research question. To start, ask yourself "What is the question that I have about teaching?" Chances are, that question will lead to some research and will probably lead to more questions. There's a community of people around these kinds of questions.

In your community, start to form conversations about what dance is. If you're truly invested in teaching and education as a partner of dance, come to an organization like Luna, where you can learn. There are lots of arts-education cohorts throughout the country. Find community and find people who have also invested in learning more about teaching and creating.