

Thinking Small

Dance educators discuss the challenges and opportunities of teaching in small communities

BY GALADRIEL WATSON

If you want to teach dance, do you have to stick to a city and pass on small-town living? *The Dance Current* spoke with three instructors teaching in communities in British Columbia with less than 8000 residents about what makes it hard and what makes it great.



LESLIE LINDBERG
Kootenay Dance Academy, Kimberley



JULIE TEINDL
Turning Pointe Dance Studio, Castlegar



RENÉE SALSISSIOLI
Kootenay DanceWorks, Rossland

Over her twenty-six years teaching in Kimberley, Leslie Lindberg has discovered you have to listen to your community. Lindberg came to Kimberley on a whim, sensing there was an opportunity to teach dance. Coming from a background of competitive dance in Saskatchewan, she was keen to introduce a similar type of program at first. But people in her newfound home had rarely had dance classes, never mind understood the need for dance shoes or regular class attendance. Lindberg found that she had to adapt her expectations to set up a program that worked for this environment. At the same time, having the only studio in town, she doesn't have to worry about competition, which she found could be exhausting, overwhelming and creatively confining in a city. She does, however, need to remain particularly committed to her own professional development. Even if it means the expense of travelling to a larger centre, Lindberg tries to stay current with the greater dance world so she can offer the best to her students.

If your students love to dance, you offer them high-quality training and you request that they learn, students will be good students, whether you're in a big community or a small one. That's what Julie Teindl has discovered over twenty years of teaching in Castlegar. Despite the community's small population, her studio boasts up to 200 students. In any community, she says, parents want their children to be involved in something. Finding staff, though, can be a challenge. While Teindl herself was born and raised in the area, and decided to return after training and teaching elsewhere, she says attracting other teachers to a smaller town can be difficult: they have to be sure this is the kind of lifestyle they want. Local opportunities like guest teachers and workshops – for students or teachers – are also hard to come by, and often self-created. And what about taking a sick day? Not if there's no one around to substitute. Still, Teindl has managed to carve out a niche she's very satisfied with – and has trained competition-winning dancers who hold their own, no matter where they are.



Skiing, skating, gymnastics – these are some of the activities against which Renée Salsiccioli's dance classes have to compete. There are only so many kids to go around, but at least it means her students are already generally physically fit. Salsiccioli, a dancer and dance teacher, moved back to her hometown of Rossland ten years ago to start her own family. Through her studio, she aims to teach her students with enough technical proficiency that they could pursue dance careers if they chose. Yet she finds it difficult to get local schools to allow the more serious students to train during school hours – a necessity since Salsiccioli is the only teacher around and her evenings are already filled. At times, she feels isolated without the companionship of other teachers and the collaboration of other dancers. On the other hand, she has gotten to know the students and parents much better than in a city, and she feels close and connected with her small-town "dance family."

Leslie Lindberg / Photo by Zoe Ferguson Photography; Renée Salsiccioli / Photo courtesy of Salsiccioli; Kaitlin Warren, Victoria Apostoliuk, Jade May, Darian DeBiasio, Anna Scheulin, Christina Hii, Emily Ryan and Aleksey Jmaiff of Turning Pointe Dance Studio in *Cello Song* / Photo by Ryan Jmaiff Photography