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Guest of Honor

Making the most of visiting-
artist residencies

BY KAT RICHTER

Guest artist Tom
Weinberger with
a SUNY Purchase student



Senior dance major Jessica Alexander was in for a surprise when she auditioned for visiting choreographer Tom Weinberger at SUNY Purchase last fall. The audition had followed a fairly standard course until several rounds in, when Weinberger, a veteran of the ultramodern Batsheva Dance Company, asked the students to introduce themselves—and to scream. "It came out louder than I expected," says Alexander, "from a deeper place." That was the first of many surprising discoveries she made over the course of the semester—thanks to Weinberger's guest residency.

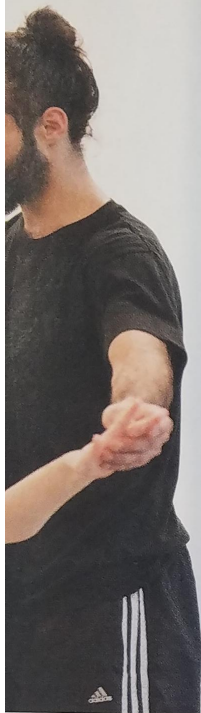
During a visiting artist's residency at a college, students get the chance to regularly interact with professionals in their field, whether via class, rehearsal or observation. Guest artists like Weinberger expose students to new techniques, engage them in novel choreographic processes and help them develop contacts in the industry. Here's how those involved (on both sides of the experience) in three distinctly different programs have made the most of the experience.

Schusterman Visiting Israeli Artists Program in Partnership with the Israel Institute

SUNY Purchase
Purchase, NY

As part of Weinberger's residency, Alexander took class twice a week in Gaga. This idiosyncratic movement vocabulary, developed by Batsheva artistic director Ohad Naharin, emphasizes self-awareness and continues to exert enormous influence on Israeli contemporary dance. Her intense study

Photo by David Cooper, courtesy of SUNY Purchase; photo by Gabrielle Lamb, courtesy of the photographer



of the technique carried over even into ballet class, where she now thinks of her body in a passé position as a grid. "It allows me to be more malleable in my balance and more alive if the position is stagnant," she says.

Weinberger's phrase work, which Alexander characterizes as being more about "sensation, as opposed to copying shape," was also a new approach for her. The entire residency, she says, expanded her vision of the dance field: "It allowed me to see so many more trajectories that I might not have been aware of before."

INSIDER TIP "I tried to write it all down at least once or twice a week, whatever he said," says Alexander. "You have to be comfortable working for yourself and learning from that, no matter what the context."

Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography

Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL

FSU professor Jawole Willa Jo Zollar has seen the benefit of residency programs from both sides of the equation. When her company Urban Bush Women completed a residency at Virginia Commonwealth University, she encountered an undergraduate whom she eventually invited to join UBW. While this doesn't always happen, there are plenty of other ways for students to develop professional connections with guest choreographers.

For faculty and administrators, residency programs bring much needed diversity into the department. "In time of old," says Zollar, "there were four predominant styles:

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Queens College students in rehearsal for Gabrielle Lamb

Photo by David Cooper, courtesy of SUNY Purchase, photo by Gabrielle Lamb, courtesy of the photographer



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