

NZSD 2011 GRADUATION SPEECH

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Congratulations to **all** of you on reaching this pivotal milestone within your life's journey. The energy, commitment, passion and love of the artform was a tsunami on the stage last night. The sheer guts and hard work that went into the process to prepare for that performance was heart felt and acknowledged by your audience, peers, parents, family, friends and tutors. You sang with your bodies and we heard you so clearly.

A career in dance as many of you know, is not a job. It's a hallowed profession. It's interesting to dig deeper into the meaning of that word, derived from the Latin *professio* - to declare publically. Definitions of the word include

- an act of openly declaring or publicly claiming a belief, faith, or opinion : protestation
- a principal calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation
- a whole body of persons engaged in a calling
- an avowed religious faith

Dance is indeed, a kind of religion. You have joined a community that you will never leave. This artform, like religion, requires and demands devotion, dedication of one's soul, great faith and a commitment to the larger ideal rather than individual glory. It asks you to give, and give and give and although demanding, one day we realise that there is such beauty in giving – to your fellow dancers, the choreographers you work with and most importantly, to your audience.

You are all part of our professional industry now – it's an honour and a responsibility to help weave your thread into a dynamic global dance industry.

So how can you best help contribute to that? And what is a professional?

- A professional carefully discovers what is needed and wanted. An amateur assumes what others need and want.
- A professional is focused and clear-headed. An amateur is confused and distracted.
- A professional does not let mistakes slide by. An amateur ignores or hides mistakes.
- A professional jumps into difficulty. An amateur tries to get out of difficult work.
- A professional remains level-headed and optimistic. An amateur gets upset and assumes the worst.

- A professional faces up to other people's upsets and problems. An amateur avoids others' problems.
- A professional uses higher emotional tones: Enthusiasm, cheerfulness, interest, contentment.
- An amateur uses lower emotional tones: anger, hostility, resentment, fear.
- A professional persists until the objective is achieved. An amateur gives up at the first opportunity.
- A professional produces more than expected. An amateur produces just enough to get by.

The first step to making yourself a professional is to decide you **are** indeed a professional.

Dance is such an exquisite artform. I believe dance is the beautifully truthful language of living, Our bodies are vessels of wisdom that are deeply connected to this land.

For some of you, these three years may be the richest swim in its ocean that your pathway intends. But the gifts of dance training will serve you so well in your lives, whatever you choose to do. The discipline, tenacity, generosity and group skills you have developed during this time are utterly applicable and highly valued in many other careers. Dance is such a strict teacher of ourselves, a mirror of our strengths and weaknesses. Take the time to reflect on your achievements and the life lessons you have learnt here.

This graduation is a turning point, a doorway to the future, a portal of possibility and a time to make choice and change. You came here with ambition, so don't please leave without it. Write those goals, identify where you want to be in 5 years, visualise.

Two years ago I re-visualised a dance landscape where a permanent, full-time contemporary NZ dance company existed with a beautiful Auckland home. I imagined walking into the building, our home, a studio of creative alchemy as we collaborate, experiment wildly with composers, musicians, photographers ,designers and new technology. We have chosen to do this here, and want to belong here.

I can taste the excitement of great new work being created in NZ, by people who are dedicated to create work for NZ and international audiences to be engaged with and inspired by. I imagined creating jobs for designers, producers, choreographers and dancers like you. I imagined one day holding an audition here and to have built a structure to be able to strengthen our dance industry and offer post-graduate training opportunities and jobs for graduates.

The New Zealand Dance Company's goal is to replenish the appetite for contemporary dance in New Zealand. Dance becomes a "must-see" event because of the beauty and vigour of life we represent. We engage our audience in non-traditional ways and we weave our art-form deeply into society.

We are culturally independent, just simply reflective of New Zealanders, identified as those people living in New Zealand.

Two years later after visualising that invigorated landscape, Frances Turner and I have raised over \$1.3 million dollars towards our goal of creating a safe place for artists to be brave and work for our finest contemporary dance practitioners. It's taken a great deal of tenacity, passion, partnership and commitment.

It's been hard, daily work and the joy has been in the generosity of many, many hearts and minds, many of them graduates of this school such as Ursula Robb who flew back from her work at the Paris Opera to perform in a fundraising launch, Artistic Assistant Liz Davey, founding members Sarah Foster- Sproull and Craig Bary and board member Katrina Todd. These people understand that a start-up arts business requires help on its journey, not just when the work is done and the jobs are created. We still have a long road ahead of us to realise our dream and need all the help we can get.

These are exciting times. There is a renaissance of global interest in our culture. An awakening of the importance of the work of this land, separate from our colonial roots. A clearing of our voice. You dancers here today are part of that voice and a developing dance language that is, as in the manifesto of our new company : earthy, funny, beautiful and brave.

My time at NZSD was rich in many ways. The development of deep respect for my tutors at the time and a growing understanding of the value of contributing to your artform in ways that are generous and bold. I made friends that are lifelong.

There will be challenges ahead. Don't be afraid of obstacles – within them lies hidden treasure. Never think if you are not first, not the favourite or in the back row, that you can't go on to excel at what you choose to invest your energy, focus, tenacity and passion in. Another person's victory is not your loss and there is room in this big needy, greedy world for all of us to try and make a difference through our commitment to our art or a common goal to touch lives and create change.

I'm just someone who visualised a future. I'm just a person with a belief, that as Robert Frost said "Freedom lies in being bold."

So dream, dream, dream. It is in **your** imagination where your future lies. And no one else has responsibility for that but **you**. Whatever the mind can conceive, it can achieve. And as all of us know.....it's the journey that's important.