

Generous is the word that comes to mind when meeting Elizabeth Spatz. She greets everyone with a ready smile and a warm hearted willingness to lend a helping hand. From giving pre-performance class prior to the Gala concert, to substituting whenever / wherever needed, to sharing career advice with our majors, Elizabeth's involvement has become an essential part of the School of Dance. In recognition of her continuous contributions to the School of Dance she received the University's **2023 Outstanding Achievement, Adjunct Faculty Service Award**.

Elizabeth began teaching at Mason after a distinguished performing career. A versatile teacher, Elizabeth teaches an impressive array of classes; ballet and modern at all levels, Teaching Methods and Somatic studies and she leads our Dance for Parkinson's community outreach class.

Born and raised in the Chicago area, Elizabeth began her study of dance at the Ruth Page Foundation with Larry Long and the Chicago City Ballet with legendary Maria Tallchief. Upon graduating from Columbia College Chicago, where she studied both arts management and dance, she relocated to New York City and danced with Dura Mater, Joanna Mendl Shaw and Randy James Dance Works (RJDW). As a founding member of RJDW she performed with the company for nine years, eventually assuming the roles of rehearsal director and associate director.

As an educator, she has taught nationally and internationally at festivals, colleges and universities including Roger Williams University, Queensborough Community College, the University of Washington, Montgomery College and Northern Virginia Community College. Her choreography has been presented at Roger Williams University, Queensborough Community College and the University of Washington. Elizabeth completed her M.F.A. in Dance at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The School of Dance is fortunate and grateful to work with Elizabeth.

You have had an extensive and impressive career both as a performer for

various companies, and as an esteemed Teacher. How has your performance career influenced your teaching?

I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with different choreographers as well as having the experience working with one company for several years and delving deeply into that work with a core group of colleagues. I think this gives me the perspective of what it is like to go beyond technique and understand that technique is a means to an end. The underlying reason of honing one's technique is to have a more facile instrument that can communicate what you want as an artist. As with any art form, how many tools do I have at my disposal? I think the other aspect is that I had to find a way to work correctly to keep my body healthy. I sought out teachers that understood anatomy and how technique could work with my facility. I try to impart the same knowledge to my students so they can perform at their best, with the facility they have, hopefully injury free.

While at Mason you have taught a wide range of classes from all levels of ballet and modern to Teaching Methods. The most recent addition to your teaching is the Somatic's class. Can you describe the purpose of that class and how you approach it?

First, I am so grateful for the guidance I received from Shaun Boyle D'Arcy, who typically teaches this class, but is on sabbatical. We were able to meet and discuss the syllabus and ways to impart the material, with the understanding that each teacher is going to have expertise in different areas. My overall approach revolves around the idea that each student's body is different, and ultimately, learning how your own body works will help you in all your dance endeavors, be it technique, composition or performing. Students that are "body wise" can more intelligently take in technical concepts and choreography and build their toolbox as to how they approach movement. Besides teaching dance, I have a background in Pilates, yoga and personal training, which has given me the opportunity to adapt to many different situations, and help people adapt to movement based on their own bodies, which are all different! For this class, we are primarily using

BodyStories, which delves into anatomy in an experiential way. It's great that students have had anatomy in their first year, so that they have a base of knowledge. We investigate different areas of the body individually and do activities that help the students really understand how the body works, and how they can translate to life and to dance. We discuss how somatics is the first-person experience of the body, so besides focusing on activities relating to specific body parts and systems, students journal about their investigations, and see how they can weave all of this into their dance and daily life. It's a very personal experience that I'm honored to be a part of.

You are certified to teach the internationally acclaimed Dance for Parkinson's classes and offer the seniors in your Teaching Methods class a unique experience as they have the opportunity to attend the Dance for Parkinson class working alongside the teachers. Can you share what that experience is like for the students?

The Dance for PD classes here at Mason are such an asset for everyone involved. This fills a real need in the community, and the students have a unique opportunity to see this wonderful program in action. This exposes them to several teaching methods we discuss in class, including delivery methods, class design, pacing, observing, and truly understanding the needs of your students. What I hear from our students is that they can see many more applications for dance in the community, beyond what they are used to in their day-to-day experience. The Dance for PD participants absolutely love having the Mason Dance students in class with them and can learn about what the students are working on and what life is like as a dance major. We offer dance majors the opportunity to show their choreography after Dance for PD classes, including a question-and-answer session about their process.

Dance for PD participants are also offered tickets to Mason dance performances, which is a unique benefit to having this program right here at Mason.