

**offstage:  
a second career**

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Interviews conducted  
between 2017 and 2022  
by career counsellors  
Dobrosława Choryńska-Chudy  
and Ewa Warchoń

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# Introduction

I remember when, at the very beginning of my dance education as a young girl, I was strongly impressed by a ballet film. I cannot quite recall its title, I think it went along the lines of *The Magic of Dancing*. Still, I remember perfectly the last scene of the film, when Giselle was wandering through the theatre corridors, only to appear on the stage amidst phantoms and fairies, and her last words sounded more or less like:

*Someone once said that we are like phantoms, and real-life takes place outside the theatre walls. However, I understood that it was only on stage that true love, delight and happiness can happen. Everything else is a delusion. I really don't know what I will be doing twenty years from now, once I quit dancing. I will probably die. It bothers me to think about it. As long as I dance, I stay alive.*

All artists, including dancers, who sooner or later had to leave the theatre and start a new life, are all too familiar with how hard it is to come to terms with the fact that the reality outside the stage is so different. However, it turns out that such a life-changing step is not only possible but also fascinating, beautiful and, above all, unavoidable at a certain point of one's stage career.

In the course of my dance career I finished my studies and took up various activities, so as to be able to change my job at some point – at least that is what I thought at the time. Even though I was also educated



in another field outside dance, and thus had an alternative, making the decision to quit dancing was very tough and took me a long time. However, none of the experiences I gained in the theatre was wasted; on the contrary, they proved invaluable in my work as a journalist. I was supposed to stay in the Kraków Opera Ballet for only a brief moment, but I spent a total of twelve years dancing for the company. Why is it so difficult to part with this profession? Because it defines us, shapes our identity, determines our way of being and living. Change seems unattainable. All the same, there comes a moment when change is necessary, as Tadeusz Kantor pointed out: “You cannot always ride the wave – you have to be the wave itself.” If you follow this line of thought, the decision becomes easier.

The Career Transition Programme for Dancers offered by the National Institute of Music and Dance is an invaluable tool for the artists who, for obvious reasons, cannot be professionally active until the age of sixty-five or sixty-seven. The financial support and the professional counselling provided by the programme help solve numerous problems that any professional dancer is bound to face. Run by the National Institute of Music and Dance, the programme is also very unique compared to its foreign equivalents. To understand this uniqueness, one must first trace the programme’s history.

When Grzegorz Chełmecki was appointed First Deputy Director of the Grand Theatre – National Opera in Warsaw in 2008, one of his initial tasks was to determine the most essential changes that had to be made in the Grand Theatre’s structure. The central problem at the time was the lack of support for ballet artists who were at the end of their dance careers. Following the amendments to the Retirement Pension Act, dancers were stripped of their right to earlier retirement, and the bridge settlement provided by the Act did not meet their needs. Grzegorz Chełmecki admitted that this professional group, invaluable from the point of view of the theatre sector, had all the reasons to feel disrespected and neglected. The termination of the social contract that had been in force for many years posed a problem not only for dancers themselves but also for the theatre management and the administration of ballet companies.

Earlier, having a legally safeguarded retirement age, both the company managers and dancers accepted the obvious fact of parting with the profession at a predefined time. Frustration appeared among the dancers who were suddenly deprived of the privilege that had earlier formed an inherent element of their work ethos – this frustration was spurred by the fear of losing one’s job, having no means to support the

family and not being able to manage one's day-to-day existence in the "outside world." As Grzegorz Chełmecki points out, a form of pressure on theatre directors emerged to keep dancers in their profession for as long as possible. Needless to say, to maintain a high level of performance of the companies, it is necessary to continue enrolling young dancers. This situation triggered numerous conflicts and tensions.

*I was observing the Grand Theatre ballet company, thinking what sort of jobs the artists could undertake if they stayed within the company after their stage career ended. I started a collaboration with Karol Urbański, a ballet artist from the Grand Theatre, who had individually carried out a research on the career transition systems for dancers in Great Britain and the Netherlands. Together with Karol, we worked along two lines – on the one hand, we were organising a system of "internal retraining" within the structures of the Grand Theatre. On the other hand, we also tried to create the foundations for the future Polish system of career transition for dancers, based on examples from other countries, recalls Grzegorz Chełmecki.*

The latter task was not an easy one due to differences in financial and administrative systems between Poland and other countries. In the existing European programmes, the major share of the financial support comes from the individual insurance premiums paid every month by the dancers and dance companies. American career transition programmes, on the other hand, are not publicly funded.

Krzysztof Pastor, who perfectly understood the problem as a beneficiary of the Dutch professional career transition programme for dancers himself, also lent his vast knowledge and experience to the architects of the Polish programme.

*In retrospect, recalls Pastor, I quit dancing after twenty years of a stage career. I was thirty-eight at the time. I believe it was an opportune moment to quit. I took advantage of the career transition programme for dancers in Holland. The programme differed considerably from the one established later on in Poland. It was financed, among others, from the personal contributions of the artists. To receive financial support from the programme you had to be active and gain qualifications that would enable you to navigate the job market. The royalties that we were getting from our dance companies were gradually diminishing, which was like a ticking clock. Our awareness of the dwindling funds forced us to assume full ownership of our second career while also triggering a good deal of creativity. I have completed a great number of choreographies and established contacts that proved very fruitful later on.*

Krzysztof Pastor became the director of the Polish National Ballet already after the abolition of early retirement for dancers. As he recalls, he was acutely aware of the bitterness and frustration that this abolition caused within the dancers community. The artists were afraid that the negotiations on any career transition system would ruin their dreams and efforts to restore the early retirement. Regardless of this public discussion, Krzysztof Pastor emphasises that a 40-year-old dancer is not and cannot be a pensioner.

*As Grzegorz Chełmecki recalls, For a number of months, we knocked on various doors of such offices as the Ministry of Culture and Art and the Ministry of Labour, we made contact with the Labour Offices and the local administration, we also tried to find partners among various representatives of the dance community. I am glad that eventually all these efforts could bear fruit in the form of the career transition programme for dancers, when the Institute of Music and Dance, newly established by the Ministry of Culture and Art, took institutional and financial responsibility for its creation.*

Joanna Szymajda, the then Director of the Institute of Music and Dance, confirmed that from the establishment of the Institute in 2010 onwards, a number of consultations were carried out, starting with the Social Insurance Institution, through the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of National Defence, which is in charge of the career transition programme for soldiers. The National Institute of Music and Dance also received considerable support from the Grand Theatre – Polish National Opera’s team and from Zenon Butkiewicz, the then Director of the Department of National Cultural Institutions at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The expertise of people associated with the IOTPD network (International Organization for the Transition of Professional dancers), also proved invaluable; the IOTPD brings together national programmes of career transition for dancers from all over the world and enhances the exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Paul Bronkhorst, the former President of the IOTPD, noticed that the Polish career transition programme is one of the youngest of its kind, while its Dutch counterpart, for example, has been operating for over thirty years. He admitted that Polish dancers have at their disposal a very effective and convenient tool, which can help them implement the difficult life change. He also pointed out that the Polish programme is fully financed by the state and allows the participants to make changes along the transition/education process while still receiving the stipend. Last but not least, he indicated how extremely stressful the process

of ending a stage career is. Dancers start their education at a very young age and they make decisions about their future professional life already at the age of ten. Hence, it is not surprising that from childhood onwards they strongly identify with their profession. According to Paul Bronkhorst, the main challenge for the organisers of career transition programmes lies in building trust in dancers and instilling in them the prime principle of confidentiality. This principle also applies in the Career Transition Programme operated by the National Institute of Music and Dance. An individual who enrolls in the programme should feel as safe as possible and assured that the career transition process will not affect his/her previous work.

The variety of career paths chosen by former dancers is enormous, which testifies to the success of the Polish programme. For many years, international organisations engaged in dancers' support have rated the Polish programme very highly in terms of its scope, methodology, and effectiveness. One its distinctive elements is the unlimited contact with the career counsellor. It is also not a standard in the world to grant funds for partial subsistence. The Polish programme provides such funding if a dancer undertakes full-time education, which makes it impossible for him/her to undertake paid work. It is also worth noting that none of the Polish career transition programmes (neither the ones operated by the Labour Offices nor the ones run by the uniformed services) provides financial support to the extent offered by the programme of the National Institute of Music and Dance.

*We refrained from profiling professional paths available within the programme. The dancers themselves are allowed to choose their second career, and the task of the counsellors is to help them and verify whether the proposed career transition project has a chance to stand the job market's requirements. This issue is treated differently in various countries – for example the Korean career transition programme offers only a few career paths to choose from. For the whole transition process it is crucial that artists enter new professions shortly after completing their studies and courses or even while still acquiring new qualifications – this allows a successful start in the new field. Therefore, the condition for granting the stipend is the declaration to end one's career as a dancer within no more than twelve months from the date of completing the career transition programme,* recounts Marta Michalak, co-founder of the programme and its coordinator between 2015 and 2018.

The career transition process requires gigantic work on one's emotions. One must stop thinking of oneself as a dancer and start identifying oneself with another profession.

*The career transition process is demanding, because when you decide to start it, you have to appeal to reason, not emotions. Unfortunately – there is no space for contesting the reality. The sooner we accept it, the better. I believe that ballet school education and being a professional dancer sculpt one's identity. For me, a dancer is a dancer for life and the career transition does not really have to change that at all,* says Karol Urbański, the current Deputy Director of the National Institute of Music and Dance.

Grzegorz Chełmecki observed a certain paradox, namely that the self-confidence displayed by the artist on stage frequently vanishes when they are confronted with the outside world and its unfamiliar reality. Being a professional artist has its peculiarities – the artist feels as if they were living in a kind of artistic “bubble,” hence starting a new life can be difficult. The broad array of competencies and skills that dancers have at their disposal often escapes them. That is why career counsellors play such a key role in the career transition programme. Without their support, ongoing conversations, patience and understanding, many artists would lose their way in their search for a second career path.

*Job counsellors are able to see dancers against of a vast spectrum of attitudes, because they have already assisted in the career transition of miners, shipyard workers, mangers and many other professionals. At the same time, they also know the specific features of dancers as professional group. For me, their knowledge, experience, professionalism and passion are the core of the whole programme. In the career transition process, the stipend holders entrust the counsellors with themselves and that requires a lot of trust and empathy,* acknowledges Grzegorz Chełmecki.

Ewa Warchoń and Dobrosława Choryńska-Chudy, two job counsellors who have been present in the career transition programme from the very beginning, admit that dancers form an unusual professional group, with a wealth of competencies and passions across a variety of fields. Discipline, creativity, consciousness, the ability to learn quickly, great diligence, the ability to combine multiple professional roles and time management, as well as the motivation to improve and highly developed artistic competences, are unique qualities on the job market. They form the foundation on which a new career path can be built.

*In the field of job counselling we call these competences transferable, which means that they can be used in other fields of professional life. Today's job market is highly appreciative of transferable skills. It does happen that people who have no experience or knowledge in personal and professional development associate a dancer's second career mainly with teaching. We should keep in mind, however, that not all dancers are predisposed to teach, nor do they have the desire to stay in the dance community. The majority of artists transition to completely different business sectors, some remain within the field of culture and art, some don't. It also happens that artists continue their professional career in theatre in a non-artistic capacity. This choice is sometimes dictated by a sense of security. The career transition process is burdened with huge stress, so our meetings with dancers are of utmost importance. The programme offers both the financial support and the relationship with a counsellor who helps analyse different options for the future. Before a dancer decides to pursue a new profession and get relevant education, he/she needs to deeply reflect on him-/herself: his/her personality, interests, skills and merits, says Ewa Warchoła.*

Dobrosława Choryńska-Chudy points out that dancers are often afraid and ask how long it would take them to learn a new profession. It turns out that this is not the biggest obstacle in the transition. The key issue is to break the barrier of verging outside the theatre environment, where artists often stay since their early schooling. This is precisely why the continuous availability of a job counsellor for current and future stipend holders, at every stage of their career transition process (planning and realisation), is one of the programme's great achievements.

Krzysztof Pastor, the Director of the Polish National Ballet, advocates for and supports the programme of the National Institute of Music and Dance. He also stresses how important it is to talk with dancers and prepare them several years in advance for the necessary career transition. The dancers' responses are not always positive, however Pastor highlights that these preliminary talks lie within the scope of his responsibility.

*There are many former dancers working at the Grand Theatre – Polish National Opera. One of the soloists currently serves as a stage manager and he does it with great passion, he is really good at it. After all, he knows the backstage as no one else. Obviously, not all dancers will find employment in the company and that is why taking the right steps, using job counselling well in advance, is an expression of self-responsibility of every artist-dancer, contends Pastor.*

The career transition programme of the National Institute of Music and Dance was designed down to the finest details, which is why it has not changed its format in the seven years of its existence. Aleksandra Dziurosz, the former Deputy Director of the Institute, emphasises that the career transition programme is not only intended for dancers working full-time in opera theatres or other dance companies. It is available to all dancers, also independent artists (freelancers) who work on commission, contracts for specific work and, or are self-employed. In each case, the most important issue is to prove that the dominant occupation for twelve years was stage work. Nowadays, dancers start the career transition process earlier, while still in good shape onstage. Building awareness of the necessity of career transition is crucial already at the beginning of artistic education. For this reason, the National Institute of Music and Dance organises a series of courses in ballet schools for children and young people. It is essential that at an early stage of their career students are aware that this profession is injury-prone, requires physical fitness and stamina, which decreases with time, and that the dancers' body and his/her ability to work effectively will also change.

The architects of the Polish career transition programme agree that its creation and existence is one of the most important achievements in their professional lives. At the same time, they hope that it will eventually become a staple of every dancer's career. Planning a second career path should be done trauma-free, but instead with the conviction that it is just the next step in one's career.

*We are immensely proud and happy because the programme continues to operate and fulfil its role. We are especially pleased with the fact that it continues to be financed by the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport. The ministerial subsidy is an expression of respect for dancers, but also that of concern for their future. Personally, I would like all artists who undergo the career transition process to feel like fully competent participants of society. It is interesting to observe how they re-establish themselves in dance-related professions. They are experts, choreographers, culture animators with invaluable knowledge and experience, says Aleksandra Dziurosz.*

I do remember countless meetings with the project team when I was working in the ballet company of the Kraków Opera. During the meetings, we received the necessary information on the programme and the benefits it entailed. Throughout the entire career transition process, Monika Kaszewska and Anna Čemeljić, the project's coordinators, were always invaluablely helpful and patiently helped us handle all the

formalities, clarify accounts and implement the necessary changes in the career transition project, all the time encouraging us to persevere and supporting us with a good word. This programme is not only about the financial support to implement our professional development plans but also about the people who enable us to make these plans a reality.

Thanks to the programme of the National Institute of Music and Dance, we gain opportunities as dancers that many could hardly dream of. We can pursue at least two careers in one lifetime and fulfil ourselves in multiple fields. A dance career is short but wonderful and intense. It furnishes us with a sensitivity to beauty, and a sense of humility towards our own profession and experience, which may unexpectedly prove invaluable in the future. I wish all dancers who hesitate to undertake this huge effort found the courage to follow through and the great satisfaction in achieving their goals. As a former dancer and recipient of the career transition programme's grant, I know how much effort it takes to change your life's course. But still, dancers are no strangers to effort. If we can practice for months for a few minutes on stage, what is four years of education compared to a lifetime?

Katarzyna Sanocka





# Marta Anczykowska

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**Marta Anczykowska is an esthetician and makeup artist, specializing in permanent makeup. A graduate of the State Ballet School in Poznań, her first notable success in dance was participation in the National Ballet Competition in Gdańsk, where she competed twice. After receiving her dance diploma, she worked as a professional dancer at the Stanisław Moniuszko Grand Theatre in Poznań. She spent her entire stage career there. Her career transition project came about when she took a break from dancing during maternity leave to raise her children. In fact, they were the catalyst that led her to embark on her second career path. In the future, she hopes to open her own business and run a professional beauty salon.**

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I started my new career path during the pandemic. I was planning to open my own beauty salon, but because of the lockdown, I put my plans on hold. Now I am considering renting a space in my sister's salon so I can offer my own services to individual clients without having to run my own business. It's a prudent but necessary decision, as the beauty industry as a whole has suffered heavy losses recently. And although I have had to revise my plans and postpone some of them, I have no regrets about re-qualifying. I have graduated and I am ready to hit the ground running. I am ready to start a new professional life.

However, it took me quite a while to even entertain the thought of a new career path. The time had to be right – my time had to come. After intense years of dancing on stage, I dedicated myself to raising my children. During my maternity leave, I began to wonder what else I could do in life besides dance.

When I gave birth to my children, I also noticed that my body was changing and that it was becoming less efficient and more injury-prone as I got older. In our profession, injuries are more common as we age, and rehabilitation takes longer than it used to. Audiences only see beauty on stage, but dance in itself is a very hard and underrated profession. Therefore, you should know when to leave the stage before the beauty of the dance is gone.

If someone were to ask me where I got the idea for a career transition project, my advice would be simple: look around and listen to other people. In my case, the inspiration for the career change came from the world around me. I listened to what other dancers were planning, what ideas they had and what doubts they faced. The Polish dance community is quite small and we usually know each other and share our experiences.

When I took up the career transition programme and started to gain new qualifications as a beautician, I was excited. But at first I also felt like I was missing dance and the stage. It took some time for me to learn how to deal with the bigger and smaller cravings. In difficult moments, I remembered how difficult it was to find time for my family while I was dancing on stage. I still miss the atmosphere of the theatre and would really like to go on stage from time to time to feel that thrill you experience before a show. Sometimes that longing is very painful.

On the other hand, the career change has brought me to a point in life where I can live like a “normal” person. My daily routine is much more regular than it used to be, and I have more time for my kids and family. This is also a by-product of the pandemic. I think I needed this time to get used to the new situation and to plan my entry into the new professional field after graduating from cosmetology school. Thanks to my career retraining, I was able to realize my dream of becoming a cosmetologist. I had first attended cosmetology school when I was still dancing, but I could not finish the course because the theatre work was too demanding. Many years later, I returned to the idea of entering the beauty industry, and this time I managed to complete my beauty courses. I have always been interested in beauty, makeup and manicures. In the theatre, I watched and learned how to do makeup

on stage. When I decided to include beauty school in my career transition project, I knew I would be satisfied with what I learned there. In addition, the courses I chose were relatively short and allowed me to retrain quickly. I supplemented my school courses with additional courses in permanent makeup, an increasingly profitable and popular type of makeup.

I am also considering training to become a beautician in the future. First, however, I want to gain as much experience and practical skills as possible. I am aware that the pursuit of perfection that comes from dancing will also feed into my new career. I know that quality matters in any profession and I want to continue to hone my skills. As a dancer, I have learned that no matter what you do, you have to work hard to succeed. Striving for perfection often prevents you from feeling like something is actually perfect. There are times when I lack the confidence to act independently and make independent decisions. I feel a great responsibility for the quality of my work, especially in permanent makeup, which is an intrusion into the client's body. My confidence is boosted by the memories of the time I spent in beauty school. When I was there, I also had fears, I felt a responsibility to the model and to the learning progress. I remember feeling that each class gave me new knowledge and skills. An interesting "side effect" of the whole learning process is sensitivity to hygiene compliance. Now when I go to the barber, dentist or beautician, I reflexively pay attention to general cleanliness and sterilization of tools. The knowledge I gained in school has given me a greater awareness and sense of responsibility for my own health and that of others. It has also given me the comfort that comes from knowledge.

Looking back, I would say that the first thing to do is to start thinking about what you want to do in life as early as possible. Second, tap into the experience and knowledge of other dancers, friends, and career counsellors. Even if you do not yet know exactly what you want to do in the future, it's worth talking to others about your options. Discuss your ideas with other people so that they finally crystallize and become more tangible. Also keep in mind that the first idea is not always the best. Sometimes you may need to change your direction more than once. Remember that decisions take time and careful thought.

# Eduard Bablidze

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**Eduard Bablidze is a pedagogue, choreographer, manager, and dancer. In 1995, he graduated from the State Ballet School in Georgia. He danced as first soloist at the National Theatre of Georgia, followed by stints as soloist at the Grand Theatre in Poznań and the Baltic State Opera in Gdańsk. He ended his dancing career at the Grand Theatre – Polish National Opera in Warsaw in 2016. Since then, Eduard has been active as a pedagogue, choreographer, and promoter of ballet events and ballet art in Europe.**

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Throughout my ballet career, I always paid attention to perceive the art of ballet in all of its aspects. I was eager to face challenges, not only those related to dance, and therefore it was already in Georgia that I began to organize concerts, ballet galas, and shows. I also dabbled in choreography, and became involved in organizing the company's international tours. The administrative challenges entailed in those ventures drove me towards legal studies, which I completed back in Georgia, and postgraduate studies for managers of culture at the University of Warsaw. I also completed studies in ballet pedagogy at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw. My goal was to gain diverse experience in order to groom myself for the role of ballet manager and promoter, which has been, and will always remain, my greatest passion.



Searching for my own path, I continued to gain experience in order to choose a career path that best suited my abilities. Dancers should consider trying themselves at choreographing, directing short pieces, or dealing with lighting design while they still work in theatre. Theatre provides a number of opportunities in different profession, and one should take their chance when at an opportune moment – mine came with Krzysztof Pastor, the Director of the Polish National Ballet, who has created favourable circumstances for dancers in this regard, and for that I remain forever grateful to him.

My last professional ballet class was an unforgettable experience. I can still recall the moment when I walked away from the bar for the last time. It was a difficult time, but several months later I knew I had taken the right decision. I was relieved, knowing that the world was wide open, and so were the new horizons and room to apply the rich experience I had gained outside my dancing career. My long-standing search had paid off – there was plenty to build on.

My decision to leave was made easier by the years of preparations, the trials and errors in different domains, and my attempts to establish myself offstage. Once you decide to conclude your dancing career, do not linger, make sure you follow through. Leaving the stage is inevitable at some point. It is usually signalled by various red flags, which make you feel your career is slowing down. You should not ignore them. Think of what you envision yourself as in theatre or outside of its confines, and consider how it can be beneficial to both you and other people. It is a complicated time in any dancer's life, not least on the psychological level. I was delighted to learn that the National Institute of Music and Dance supports dancers throughout the process, both through the scholarship, which covers the transition expenses, and by the feedback offered by the councillors who are always there to help you out with your plans and dilemmas.

I would advise other dancers to first realize that the more we engage in our work, the faster the time seems to flow. One must think of one's future, even though we all give it our best on stage. We must dive into new things, even if it requires financial investment, because our careers may come to a close at any time. One should not project they will dance until they turn 40 and feel safe staying in the moment. Each rehearsal or class is potentially career-ending.

Today I know that one must know what they want and what they strive for. Apart from sound knowledge, studying at the ICAN Institute enabled me to meet many people from different sectors outside of theatre. It

was important to me to be able to think and act outside of the cultural and artistic box.

At present, I am developing a network of national ballet theatres in Europe. My goal is to create a platform to develop new pieces and foster exchange between theatres, invite guest teachers from other theatres, organize master classes for ballet students and workshops for the public and ballet enthusiasts. I have many plans, backed up by first-class preparation as an ICAN Institute graduate, and by my conviction that I will build my second career around ballet, to which I have devoted my stage life.





# Sebastian Borkowski

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A personal coach, culture animation and culture project management specialist, Sebastian Borkowski graduated from the Roman Turczynowicz Ballet School in Warsaw. He was a dancer of the Grand Theatre – Polish National Opera. He is especially fond of his participation in *Grek Zorba* (Zorba the Greek) with which he toured Spain, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Brazil, Argentina and Israel.

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Dance and theatre have always been a dream world for me. I have always enjoyed performing and hearing the audience applause. I have been working as a dancer for 21 years. Now I have two other jobs. I work as a culture animator and culture project management specialist in the City Cultural Centre, where I organise cultural events and activities. Secondly, I work as a personal coach – I was able to develop the skills necessary for this job thanks to the support of the Career Transition Programme for Dancers. I consider the work as personal coach as a form of extension of my stage career because as a personal coach I work with body and movement. This work truly fascinates me and it is fully consistent with me. I really enjoy being in contact with the people I coach, I like talking to them and giving them advice.

I'm glad to see my clients satisfied with their own progress, which is often also noticed by their relatives and friends. Sometimes I feel that when I am working as a personal coach I am not really working; it is so natural, so pleasant for me. I think I emanate this positive approach and my clients can sense it. And as a result, other clients turn up, because someone recommended me as a coach.

I started thinking about career transition when I was still working at the Grand Theatre – Polish National Opera. I was aware of the fact that because early retirements had been abolished by the government, I would soon have to face a new reality. Since I always liked the gym, the idea of being a gym instructor or a personal coach did cross my mind. But soon after that, I forgot about it. And then, one day, one of my colleagues, a fellow dancer, reminded me of these ideas. I can say that he filled me with a lot of enthusiasm and made me believe in my project, which I named “My Personal Coach.”

When I left theatre, the hardest thing was to become completely independent. Earlier, the company provided everything and now I was on my own. So when I began working for business companies and individuals in the open job market, I realised I had a lot to learn. Also, when I took up administrative work in the Cultural Centre, sitting behind a desk was difficult to bear. It took me a long time to get used to the sitting body position. However, it was nice to change the environment, meet many new people and places.

My wife and family were very important for me during the whole transition process. I joined the Career Transition Programme for Dancers about 4 years after leaving the theatre. At that time I already had a job in the Cultural Centre but I was nonetheless wondering what else I could do. I received amazing support from the Programme, it made me feel that the world needed me. The career counsellor provided by the Programme motivated me a lot. She worked with me extensively during individual sessions and gave me home assignment. Her supervision helped me realise many positive things about myself. I'd been thinking about working as a personal coach before, and then, the idea has returned during our sessions. I am glad it happened. Within the Career Transition Programme I managed to acquire the required qualifications and am now truly enjoying my new job. This professional change makes me feel fulfilled and satisfied with my life.

I think it is truly challenging for any dancer to leave the stage. It is sad to depart from the atmosphere, the audience, the applause... But life is comprised of many different stages. Being a dancer is a beautiful but short-lived profession (just like being an athlete).

It is just a phase in your life and after that phase, there comes another one. Sometimes I think that by starting a new career path, us dancers can develop ourselves more, use our inner potential, do interesting things and thus avoid stagnation. The end of a dance career can be an interesting beginning of a new stage in one's life. My message to dancers who are at the beginning of their dance career is, "Time flies. Turning 30 or 40 seems far ahead, but it's not. It's good to have the overarching purpose in your life, but it's also good to have backup options. And it's good to keep an open mind."

# Maciej Cierzniak

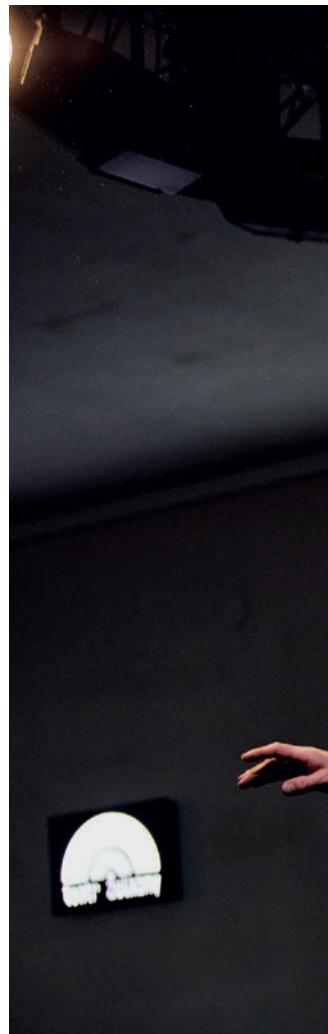
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**Maciej Cierzniak is an actor, dancer and choreographer. A graduate of the State Ballet School in Bytom, he danced in the Silesian Opera's ballet company in Bytom, as a coryphée of the Capitol Musical Theatre in Wrocław, and a soloist of the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk and Rozrywki Theatre in Chorzów.**

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Among other things, in the course of my career transition I was focused on preparing myself to train for a new job – that of a professional actor. At the moment, most of my roles still contain elements of dance, so have not bid farewell to the stage, nor would I want to. I am happy to be able to use my experience as a dancer in my current job. I like what I do, and on top of that I can earn money in the way that is closest to me. As of now, I am more interested in dramatic theatre than musical theatre. When preparing for a career change, I had already realized my own projects, where the dance-to-acting ratio shifted towards acting tasks. However, I was unable to do the professional actor's exam, as the commission did not convene for a long time due to the fact that I was the only ready to take it.

I am also a ballet tutor at the Rozrywki Theatre in Chorzów, and in this regard the courses I took have been very helpful. I completed a course in yoga in prevention and therapy and a personal trainer course, as well as an English course. Thanks to this, my coaching knowledge





is more extensive, as is working in a second language, not least because I have more and more foreign language clients.

Since I don't like paperwork and accountancy, the only inconvenience I encountered in the career transition process was the drafting of the financial report from the scholarship. My favourite memories from the career transition process are related to the sense of returning to the past. I felt that I was again on the path of educating myself. In my prior education, I was often affected by pressures from my parents... It felt great to do something simply because you wanted to do it rather than because you had to. My fondest career transition memory is the presentation of my diploma.

Bringing my plan to fruition was possible thanks to the proper management of my studying and working time. I was also lucky to take advantage of the financial assistance offered by the scholarship, because in order to study and complete my courses, I had to give up some of my commissions.

If I got to be a professional dancer all over again, I would immediately think of a second, parallel track, because the later it gets, the harder it is to start from scratch.

# Beata Danielska

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**Beata Danielska is a classical and traditional dance teacher, fitness instructor and dancer. She graduated from the Ballet School in Bytom in 1988. Immediately after graduation, she joined the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble, where she worked as a dance soloist until 2013. Together with the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble she performed a broad scope of dance repertory and visited numerous countries.**

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I have decided to finish my stage career in 2013. It was then that I realised that there was no early retirement plan for dancers and that due to getting older, I would not be able to continue my stage career for the following dozen years. At that time, I received and accepted the proposal to work in the Silesian Education Centre as an Education Specialist.

I worked in the office and organised trips and workshops. I had a lot of office work, a lot of paperwork and a lot of planning and reporting. I worked alone, surrounded by four walls, where I spent almost whole days at the computer, with little contact with other people. I felt that it wasn't my cup of tea, I felt that I was suffocating. Therefore, in 2016 I made an appointment for a meeting with a career counsellor within the framework of the Career Transition Programme for Dancers. When I turned up for the first interview I really didn't know what to do next. The only thing I knew was that what I had been doing so far didn't satisfy me anymore. During the interview with the career coach, I discovered which direction I should take and I should do. This encounter helped me realise and see what I missed the most, and the conversation helped me discover new possibilities and tap into my passion for cultivating physical culture and various forms of movement.





In 2016, I decided to enter a career transition process that would fully resonate with me and my needs and dreams. In this process, the support of my family also played an important role. Currently, I am a classical and folk dance instructor, fitness instructor, coordinator of a vocal and ballet school, where I conduct, among others, dance classes. At my current place of work, I also conduct fitness workshops for seniors (which are very popular). I love to conduct classes with groups of different age – from children to senior people.

The most difficult moment in the career transition process was my first appearance at the folk dance instructor course, organised at the headquarters of the Association for Art and Artistic Education. I was surrounded by young people. At the same time, this process was very interesting – I had a chance to meet many fascinating individuals and teachers, from whom I could and still can learn a lot about dance and the regions of Poland and their culture. My current work seems to me to be a natural continuation of my professional path. I do what I have always been fascinated with and I do it with more knowingly and more intently. I can work with people, share my experience and passion with others, I can work with movement and promote a healthy lifestyle and various forms of physical activity. I feel fulfilled. I do what I love.

It seems to me that in the career transition process the hardest part is the very decision to go for it. This process can drag for years. I think, however, one ought to be brave in deciding to finish one's stage career and enter the career transition process. It is difficult. However, it is better if one makes this decision on his/her own rather than waits for the moment when someone else suggests going off the stage. If you manage to plan this transition in your head, the effort of carrying it out, in reality, will be much smaller.

I would advise other dancers that career transition is worth pursuing. It gives us, dancers, a second wind. A new life if you please. To those dancers who have just embarked on their careers, I would sell it as a beautiful profession, filled with wonderful moments and experiences, with the provision that these days you one must always have a fallback plan at the back of one's head. Anything can happen in your life, so it is worth having an "emergency exit" ready just in case you need it. Make sure to think and take advantage of any opportunity to develop your competencies more broadly and take such measures in advance.

# Iwona Grocholska

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**A dance educator, choreographer, coach, social skills trainer and dancer, Iwona Grocholska graduated from the State Ballet School in Bytom and majored in pedagogy of ballet at the Academy of Music in Warsaw. She was featured in dance productions of the National Folk Ensemble of Song and Dance “Mazowsze,” and from 1993 onwards she joined the Silesian Operetta/Musical Theatre in Gliwice, where she worked as a ballet soloist from 1999 onwards while also simultaneously serving as a ballet educator in Post-secondary Vocational Vocal and Ballet School in Gliwice. In 2017, she was awarded the “2nd Degree Individual Prize” of the Ministry of Education for her distinctive contribution to the development of artistic education in Poland.**

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Change can be stimulated by a random episode, an injury, an organizational switch or a transformation of the profile of your theatre. Such things happen and you have to be aware of them. In my case, the decision to gain new competencies outside dance was prompted by the company’s restructuring, therefore it is worth having a safety chute, regardless of your physical condition and the stage of your professional career. We have many interesting traits that we can employ when navigating in various directions. Among these traits are self-discipline, work ethic, stress resilience and optimism, all of which result from being in motion and working and living with music. Our profession is difficult, full of physical and psychological sacrifices, and occasionally it leaves no room for personal life. Enjoying our profession is part of our work, we have a sense of happiness and we dwell in an optimistic community.

The microcosm of stage is magical, otherworldly, artificial, and though our agency is rather limited, we do not have to take up difficult professional decisions. We are not taught to do this, we are not taught that a new path means taking up a decision about your life. My new path



is my new passion. It is about experiencing something new, sharing knowledge with other people. I always wanted to be active in various fields and the choice I made created a new space for me to do that. My choice included: Professional Coaching Study, 1st Level School for Trainers and workshops on: flipping, sketch noting and voice emission.

I resigned from my stage career before I was granted the scholarship. My decision was a result of a lingering injury that limited my physical capacities. Due to the injury, I found the time to find my footing in a different realm. If you do not know how to start, you should reflect on the moments when you feel happy – what is it you that makes you happy? How are you acting when you feel happy? It is also worth using the support of a professional advisor, coach or mentor. This can be a great contribution to your transition, a simple conversation about your plans and concepts is very helpful. The world is accessible for us and we have plenty of opportunities. Also, the examples of people who made efficient use of financial support are very optimistic.

From my personal experience, I know that making a decision can be a matter of an impulse, but this impulse should be preceded by a longer reflection. I believe that it is better to make one accurate choice instead of relying on luck. We do not have to learn everything at once. It is far more profitable to learn less but do so thoroughly.

Having decided on my path, I submitted the scholarship application. Soon, I received positive feedback and the notification that I was granted the scholarship. I felt as if I was presented with a gift voucher to my favourite shop to buy whatever I wished.

Surely, I am not the only one who is aware of the huge role that the career transition programme's team has played in preparing me to acquire new qualifications. Starting with the career transition project plan, then the application and the scholarship budget – on all of these stages I felt wrapped by their assistance. I am sincerely grateful to the entire team of the Career Transition Programme for Dancers, and in particular, I would like to thank my professional counsellor Ms Dobrosława Choryńska-Chudy and Ms Anna Čemeljić, who assisted me in the formal-accounting matters of the process. I get an impression that owing to the Professional Coaching Study and the School for Trainers as well as multiple workshops that I participated in, helped me get on my life's highway – instead of seeing only a narrow trail in the woods. I can see an open horizon in front of me. The world of the theatre stage is beautiful, but it remains a man-made creation. It is worth learning new things, leaning on your free will and your right to make choices.

# Jakub Józwiak

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**Jakub Józwiak is a photographer and a dancer with 15 years of professional experience. His career started at the Roma Musical Theatre in Warsaw. He made a solo appearance in the musical *Cats*. He was also featured in the Chorus line in Capitol Theatre in Wrocław. In Canada, he was a member of one of the most renowned and spectacular world companies, Cirque Du Soleil. He also performed in the most popular Polish venues, including the Warsaw Chamber Opera, Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic, Rampa Musical Theatre and D. Baduszkowa Musical Theatre in Gdynia. As a dancer and a choreographer, he has appeared on TV shows and in international dance contests and dance concerts in many countries.**

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I have just completed the Carrier Transition Programme and I have to admit that entering the Programme was one of the best decisions I have made in my professional life. I am working as a freelance photographer.

The thought of making a career change first came to me 3 years ago. I have always been interested in photography. I took a lot of pictures with my cell phone. However, at a certain moment, I had a sense that I need a better tool to capture things I wanted to preserve in my photographs. I made up my mind to invest in an SLR (single-lens-reflex) camera and start taking photos professionally.



At the beginning, I started reading on photography and equipment operation. I read and practised at the same time. But since I was performing at different theatres in various cities, the continuous travel made it difficult for me to study. When I was granted the scholarship, I was able to focus entirely on learning photography techniques. The financial support of the scholarship made it possible for me to undertake the full-time course at the Warsaw Academy of Photography. I was provided with financial means not only to cover the study fee but also my daily subsistence. Thereby, I could be fully devoted to my photography studies.

The moment of graduating from the Warsaw Academy of Photography was just the beginning of my career path as a professional photographer. I continue to build my professional skills and develop my competencies, as well as gain new ones. I have tons of ideas that provide me with a lot of possibilities in the new profession. I create my own projects that add to my personal portfolio and carry out sessions for commercial clients. Since photography is a freelance profession, I can still be in touch with dance as a freelancer. I am free to arrange my work-time in accordance with my needs and the possibilities available on the job market.

Taking the decision to change my profession was not a difficult moment. First of all, before I decided to quit dancing, I had managed to compile sufficient knowledge and experience in the field of photography. This reassured me that my choice was sound. I had learned the tools and verified that I would feel comfortable in this profession.

Taking photos is a lot of fun, I can get lost in the process and it gives me nothing but satisfaction. I will always dance and be physically active, this will guarantee my health. But dancing is no longer my main occupation. Now I am devoted to photography.

The career transition process brought about a very positive change in me. For quite a long time before the transition, I had been struggling with an injury, and getting engaged in a new occupation gave my body the time to regenerate, which put me in a better frame of mind.

The career counsellor provided by the Career Transition Programme played a considerable role in my transition process. Besides multiple valuable suggestions regarding the new professional path, I also received support at every possible stage of my new career project.

I always thought that appropriate experiences happen at appropriate moments. Experiencing new things and testing oneself in new roles is



worth trying. Do so without fear and anxiety. Carefree and with a light heart. Precisely in the same way as when one takes up dancing. To all those who plan a career transition, I wish you courage in exploring new domains and developing new interests. To those who are only at the beginning of a dancer career, I would say: lose yourself in dance entirely, but remember it will all pass at a certain moment... and you can't but accept it, because this is the way things are.

## Wojciech Kaleniecki

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**Wojtek Kaleniecki currently works as a trained physiotherapist with an MSc in physiotherapy. He began his dance training at the age of 8 at the ABC Czechów Cultural Centre under Renata Pyszniak. He started his dancing career as a member of the Es Dance Theatre in Lublin, with which he won the Golden Mask Award in Poznań. He underwent professional training in contemporary dance, classical dance and break dance. In 2007, he joined the Musical Theatre in Lublin, where he danced in all of the company's productions.**

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Back then, when still active as a professional dancer, I also graduated from BSc studies in physiotherapy. I encountered the greatest difficulties at the beginning of my studies; combining professional job, training and repertoire performances with studying was a considerable challenge and I made great sacrifices. Acquiring a BSc degree was the beginning of my new path. The next stage in my education, i.e. the MSc course, required additional financial input but also opened up countless opportunities for further personal development. This development, however, hinged on how much money I had back then, and to be honest, the salary I earned at the theatre was not too high. I felt as if I was suspended in a vacuum: on the one hand, I had practical dance skills, but on the other I held no professional license.





When I received the notification that I was granted the financial support I could not believe it. I clearly remember the day when I received the first part of the scholarship. It was only then that my wife and I believed that I would actually be able to complete the courses that I had dreamt of. It was a genuine incentive for me – the very impulse I needed to act! An incredible feeling that I will remember till the end of my life! The world became colourful, with me discovering colours I had not known before.

Before I entered the programme I had to terminate my dancing career at the theatre. The occupational medicine physician that I consulted said that I should definitely STOP working as a dancer. Had I continued the stage career and sustained another injury, it could have cost me my health. It came as a great shock but I had seen it coming, I made a good decision. I entered the career transition programme right before an imminent accident and as much as it was difficult to believe I had some future perspectives. The employment as a physiotherapist came as unexpectedly as the career transition programme or the sudden end of my career. Oh, yes, it was an unusual time.

I realised that nothing could stop me. The programme had begun and I had the money to make my dreams come true. I started my MSc course and new opportunities were opening up for me.

Quitting the stage career on a day's notice brought about a huge change in my personal life. I was very surprised to see myself staying home at 6 p.m., with an entire evening for myself and my family. It took me some time to believe that I do not need to rush to a rehearsal at that hour. I hardly knew how to behave! Contrary to earlier days, when I had too little free time, now I had even too much of it. Fortunately, my studies required a lot of intensive learning, so I quickly sorted things out. Yes, I started a new chapter in my life. The change from the theatre mode of living to the normal one resulted in my rejuvenation because I almost immediately found a job in my new profession. My family life is much easier now and we are also more stable financially. I also don't have to fear for the future every day, thinking about the injuries sustained and projected. I don't have to think about whether I will walk off the stage in shape or disabled. I am now fully educated and my know-how is soundly backed by twenty years of dance and bodywork experience. Therefore, it is much easier for me to understand my patients and their needs. In my new job I sometimes cause a bit of a sensation. My range of movement is greater than most people's, so when someone sees me rehabilitating patients in an unusual position, he/she does not believe his/her eyes :).

If a few years earlier someone had asked me where I saw myself in ten years and if I was sure I would be able to dance that long, I would have surely answered that I would be performing not for ten but twenty years. As a young boy I was lustful for dance and life, I felt indestructible. I didn't think about myself or my family. I would tell myself then, "You need to have a backup plan." One too many falls and the dance could be over. In retrospect, I can see how much the responsibility for my dance partners weighed on me, especially after sustaining so many serious injuries. There was this overwhelming fear that because of my indisposition someone else could get injured or that I would end up in a wheelchair myself.

I am also greatly indebted to my wife, who is a physiotherapist, too. She helped me endure the most difficult moments, she gave me the strength to apply to the programme, too. She believed in me, seeing how much it matters to me to become a physiotherapist. She was sure, I would pursue the career transition despite the effort it required. The financial support provided by the career transition programme allowed me to continue my MSc studies and obtain full education and thereby to develop a new professional career.

At present, I continue acquiring new skills and knowledge. I have a list of training courses that I want to take to improve as a physiotherapist, and I am happy to be able to finance them on my own. This would not have been possible without the new competencies that I had gained thanks to the career transition programme's scholarship. The change began with a conversation with the career counsellor, who visited us at the theatre. It seems to be a small thing, but in fact this conversation changed a great deal in my life. I am happy to be a part of this programme and serve as an inspiration to other dancers who are still hesitant. I keep my fingers crossed for all of you.

## Marcin Kędziora

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**Marcin Kędziora is a Main Occupational Health and Safety and Fire Protection Specialist, Entrepreneur, Advanced First Aid Rescuer, Member of the Board of the Dance and Ballet Section of the Association of Polish Stage Artists (ZASP), Member of the Main Board at the ZASP Territorial Defence Force soldier, and dancer – coryphée. Immediately after graduating from the Ballet School in Łódź, he was invited for the audition to the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble. Since that time, he has been professionally associated with the company, although his role has changed over the years. He cooperated with such renowned choreographers as C. Drzewiecki, J. Kubanka, H. Chojnacka.**

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I currently work as a Main Occupational Health and Safety and Fire Protection Specialist in the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble, where I am responsible for the broadly-understood safety of the company and of the people who visit our stage. As an Advanced First Aid Rescuer, I am also the one who provides first aid. Apart from working in the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble, I also run a private business focused on delivering professional training in the field of first aid. In addition, I am a soldier in the 13th Silesian Brigade of Territorial Defense Forces. In this capacity, I have been intensively mastering my tactical medicine (TCCC/CTM) skills, with new opportunities unfolding before me. The command appreciates my knowledge, high competencies as a trainer, as well as my work ethic and commitment.

It was just before I turned thirty that the thought of making the career transition crossed my mind for the first time. I suffered from a serious spine injury and I didn't know whether I'd be able to return to dancing after the rehabilitation. Immediately after the accident, I had a meeting with the Executive Director of the "Śląsk" Song and Dance Ensemble, to tell him about my condition. The Director said that he'd be keen to help me as long as I showed personal engagement in the search for a new occupation and in the process of completing and supplementing my education. This meeting was very important for me and it stimulated me to complete MSc studies. After a while, when a vacancy opened at the "Śląsk" Song and Dance Ensemble at the position of Main Occupational Health and Safety Specialist, the director of the company contacted me and offered me the job. He also proposed to provide me with complimentary education in the field of Occupational Health and Safety measures and supported me in getting basic qualifications. I must admit that at the beginning I knew very little about the work of an Occupational Health and Safety Specialist and I was not sure that this is the right professional path for me. But as I started exploring the subject deeper, this line of work gradually grew on me.

I remember well that on 1 March 2008 I signed a part-time work contract as an Occupational Health and Safety Specialist in the "Śląsk" Ensemble. I wanted to continue my education in this field.

My main goal in joining the Career Transition Programme for Dancers was to add to my competences. I wanted to be competent in my new profession. The Programme supported me in this respect and helped me look at my career transition from a much wider perspective. I gained more confidence. If it hadn't been for the Programme's help, I wouldn't have become a First Aid Rescuer. When I was in the process of transition, educating myself in the new field, I got to know my new profession better and to understand the requirements and needs of the market in this field. The passion to develop myself further is still within me. I have already completed the Programme but I still want to extend my knowledge.

When I faced the prospect of career transition, I felt lost, I didn't know which way to go. It was tough. At the time, I spent a lot of time talking to other people – that's how the path of my new career began to slowly emerge. It was a process. The most exciting thing in the transition process was attending numerous courses. Each of these courses and each meeting with new people gave me a chance to confront my weaknesses and to develop myself further. I liked gaining new knowledge very much,





I must admit that I was gulping on it. I knew that what I would learn was and would remain my resource.

My wife was very supportive throughout the transition process. If it wasn't for her, I would have failed at the very beginning. It was thanks to her that I was able to participate in numerous courses, as she took over most of the daily duties at home. The assistance offered by the Director of "Śląsk" was also important for me. He facilitated my participation in various courses from the logistic point of view.

If I were to choose a symbol of my career transition, I'd choose the military oath. The act of taking the oath was an extraordinary experience for me – a passage to another stage of my life.

In hindsight, I think that thanks to the career transition I opened myself to new opportunities. And now I think that nothing is impossible. All you have to do is have an open mind and a willingness to change. The obstacles exist only in our head. If you can overcome them, you can aim high.

The most difficult part of ending the dance career is the very act of making the decision. As dancers, we have to face the fact that our stage time will once be over. It's inevitable. And that's why it's good to be open to new career options. My message to other dancers is: "Don't be afraid! Be open to new things and new experiences. Keep moving forward."

As an Occupational Health and Safety Protection Specialist, I train dancers entering the "Śląsk" Ensemble. I usually tell them that the time to make a contingency plan for the future is now – they should start planning where they'll be in 10-15 years. Discovering the whole scope of your inner talents is a process that takes time, so you should start early. Otherwise, it will be very difficult for you to complete the transition process in one year and develop additional skills. Don't waste your chance for development, don't waste your time.

# Magdalena Klimiuk

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**A physiotherapist, Sensory Integration therapist, highly valued dance instructor competent in numerous dance techniques and professional dancer, Magdalena Klimiuk graduated from the State Ballet School in Łódź. She spent 12 years dancing in the Polish National Song and Dance Ensemble “Mazowsze.” The dance repertoire she performed in was showcased in some of the most important theatres in the world. She had a special fondness for dancing folk dances from the Podlasie region of Poland.**

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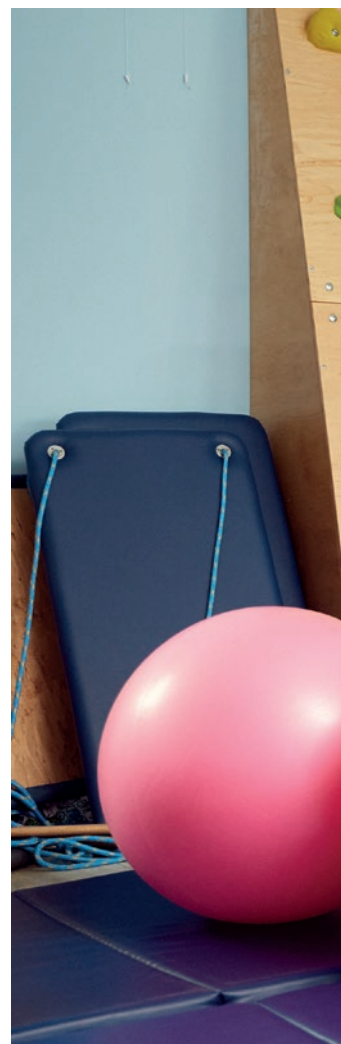
Nowadays, I work as a dance instructor in ballet, modern dance, musical dance with elements of acrobatics (I teach the latter to “Mazowsze” dancers). This year, I also started working in a new profession, as a rehabilitation physiotherapist in the physical therapy clinic “Sorno” in Milanówek and a newly established clinic in Żabia Wola. I specialise in multilayered work with children focused on curing faulty posture, scoliosis, rare diseases and sensory integration. I like to combine these two types of work – that of an instructor and as a physiotherapist. Ultimately, I know that the proportions will change in favour of physiotherapy and with time this new field will take all of my professional time.

I started to think about specific professional change more or less after 8 years of intensive dancing, when I was affected with the first pains and overloads, which caused my body to slowly become less and less efficient.

I knew the direction in which I wanted to navigate my further professional development. Apart from dancing, I have always been interested in medicine. As I graduated from ballet school, I wondered whether to pursue a dancing career or enter a medical university. I chose dance, my great passion, and now I choose physiotherapy, my second great passion. Even before joining the Career Transition Programme, I completed master's studies in physical education. I also completed many instructor and medical courses and postgraduate studies in physiotherapy in sports and compensation and corrective gymnastics. I also started my bachelor's studies in physiotherapy. I thought that in the future I would be working with adults, maybe with athletes, and so I was not sure what major to choose.

Working as a volunteer has helped me to clarify my new career path. I decided to do many unpaid internships. I chose carefully the clinics where I wanted to study, watched the classes, talked to physiotherapists. This allowed me to very consciously choose the specialisation that resonated with me. I found out which courses are most valuable in the market. I also started to include elements of dance in my rehabilitation practice, which helped me achieve fabulous results. I also noticed that I get the most satisfaction from working as a physiotherapist with children. I feel in this field, I have a tangible influence on the further correct development of the child. It is very important for me, I think that working with children is priceless. During the career transition process, I have also developed my interpersonal skills, especially with regard to motivating the child and establishing relationships with him/her as a dance instructor. These skills allow me to work very effectively with young patients, who are often unwilling to do the exercises and lack body awareness at the beginning of the rehabilitation process.

The hardest thing for me in the entire career transition process was that to be able to realise my plan and develop my new passion I had to get off the stage. The logistics of my specialisation courses made my full-time work as a dancer impossible. Therefore, in the most intense part of the career transition process within the Programme, I accepted dance jobs only on a mandate contract basis. And although I felt bad about being forced to reduce my working time as a dancer, I felt encouraged to continue the transition process by the thought that I would participate in the most valuable, prestigious specialist physiotherapy courses that will provide me with the knowledge that I would not be





able to gain without the support of the Career Transition Programme organised by the National Institute of Music and Dance.

During the whole transition process, I was supported by my family, husband and friends. I also received a lot of help from the Programme's team. They were in constant contact with me, motivated me, helped at every stage of the Programme, and most importantly they were genuinely interested in me and how I was doing in the Programme, which was crucial for me. Without this human touch and support (regardless of the Programme's financial support) it would all have been extremely difficult for me.

I remember that I had a moment of hesitation. I thought to myself, "What am I doing? Am I quitting my job as a dancer just to start everything from scratch?" Then I realised that this Programme was my a chance to develop my second passion and participate in truly unique courses. I think it may be difficult for dancers to change their career path if they do not have any other passion outside dance. It's extremely important to be aware of the things you like doing and are keen on, instead of blindly following the general job market trends. Along your professional path, you have to search for yourself, and clearly define what it is that you want. It is also important not to be afraid. The most difficult part of the career transition is the first step. As you make it, you get the impression that you are abandoning your earlier life and this very thought is hard to hold. But there is never a good time for change, you just have to make the change and go on.

Such a major overhaul can be a beautiful process during which we can educate ourselves the way we want, no longer as children but as mature adults who make a conscious decision about their future. When I entered the Programme and began the transition process I felt it as if I was starting a new life. I think it's important to feel that way when the time comes to leave something behind.

My advice for dancers who are at the beginning of their professional stage career is – you always have to have a "plan B." Dancing is a wonderful passion, but it is a fleeting profession. Look for something that can give you as much fun and satisfaction as dancing. And remember that you can shape your career path and yourself.

# Piotr Korpusik

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**Piotr Korpusik is a folk dance choreographer and a long-standing dancer with the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble. He graduated from the State Ballet School in Gdańsk. He is a recipient of numerous prestigious prizes, including two awards presented by the President of Poland.**

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I consider my dance career to have been very successful. I felt highly appreciated at work and together with the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble, I visited many interesting places in Poland and abroad. It was also through dance that I met my wife and started a family.

Currently, I work as a dance instructor and choreographer, I give dance classes for children and organise ballet performances. I also work with seniors. In my work, I make use of my musicality, sensitivity and creativity. Through the Career Transition Programme for Dancers I have broadened my experience in dance, creation process and conducting classes and my understanding of the dancers and their work has deepened.

I started considering career transition seriously, just when I learned about the existence of the Career Transition Programme for Dancers organized by the National Institute of Music and Dance. Before that, I had already known that my dance career would not last until the age of 45 and end with a retirement pension. But before the Career Transition Programme for Dancers was launched, I clearly lacked the impetus to start considering my post-dancing career seriously.

The hardest part of the entire process was making the decision to do something outside of the stage. But when the idea came up, giving that new thing a try and proving myself at it wasn't that difficult. Meeting a career counsellor as part of the Career Transition Programme was immensely helpful. It was during the counselling sessions that I came

up with the idea of a new profession and received practical help in designing my transition in such a way so that I would be able to implement it and enter a new profession.

At the beginning of the career transition, I found it very new to work with seniors. I had worked with children before and I knew that I felt good about this job. In terms of working with seniors, it was crucial for me that the women I worked with were satisfied with their classes and had a sense of achievement. I also wanted to be able to see the results of my work and be content with them. Working with seniors turned out to be a very nice and positive surprise. The women I work with have a great passion for dance and I like observing this passionate flame in them. I am also very happy to know that have already started meeting outside my classes in order to repeat and practice the choreographic phrases. Working with children and seniors has two things in common. Firstly, you need to spend quite a lot of time on repeating the choreographic phrases; secondly, the participants are having great fun while working with you. Both the children and the female seniors. Well, perhaps the women have even more fun than the children, and they are definitely more diligent in their class work.

When I look at myself from the post-transition perspective, I see the same person as before. The only difference is that it is not me who dances on the stage but the people I teach. This also brings a lot of satisfaction. Granted, it is different from that derived when dancing yourself, but equally enriching.

The difficult part of the career transition is that I will not have as much contact with those I worked with for many years as I did before. I have always felt good on stage and leaving it has brought about a feeling of sadness. I realized that I was actually closing a certain chapter in my life. But I also think that this is a very natural thing to do because nothing lasts forever. These are facts and this is the reality of life – that's what I'd say to other dancers. What I'd add to this statement is that maybe they should start thinking about career transition a bit earlier than just before the end of the stage career. It is not good to leave this for last and make snap decisions.

My message to young dancers who are at the beginning of the stage career is, "Use your chance to dance onstage to the fullest and show your potential. At the same time, start looking for other things that you are good at and the ways to educate yourself in those departments."







# Paweł Kruk

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**A dancer and professional driver, Paweł Kruk graduated from the Minsk Ballet School (Belarus). He worked as a dancer at Opera Nova in Bydgoszcz, where he danced for 20 years performing the company's entire repertoire.**

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I am currently in the process of gaining comprehensive qualifications to work as a professional driver. I am planning to look for a job as a driver in a haulage company soon, and I know that I will find many job offers. At the moment, I am working in Norway, where I operate different kinds of machines and drive a forklift truck in the factory's production hall. For now, this job suits me and I appreciate it, especially for the lack of stress. I can even say that I have learned on the job that you can have a work ethic and carry out your duties with great attention to punctuality and at the same time do it without pressure or stress. But I will soon be changing this job because I want to work as a driver.

I was very much aware that my work as a dancer would sooner or later be over. The time was passing and obviously, I wasn't getting any younger. But the necessity to rethink my future struck me hard when I heard that the early retirement pensions for dancers were abolished. I knew I had to do something and I was waiting for a trigger. It came from the outside and I am grateful to fate that it did.



When I stopped working at the Opera, my friends told me about the possibility of working abroad. Having finished my work as a dancer, I simply needed to earn money first, and working in Norway was an opportunity to gain financial stability. When I started working at the factory, at the beginning there was quite a lot of stress. I didn't know how to operate the machines, I wasn't sure I could handle everything. But I learned everything very quickly. The factory supported me and my colleagues showed me how to navigate in the field.

I learned about the Career Transition Programme for Dancers from posters and flyers. I must admit that at the beginning I was sceptical about the whole thing. I simply thought it was too late for me to attend courses.

My doubts were dispelled after the first meeting with the career counsellor. It helped me understand the entire idea behind the Career Transition Programme and made me see how I could use it to pave my new career path. I started thinking about what I wanted to do and what I was still capable of achieving in my life. Since I was a child, I have always been very curious about the world and liked to explore it. I have also been fascinated by cars and motoring, so I immediately thought about becoming a professional driver to be able to drive for example on international routes. At that time I decided to take part in the Career Transition Programme and apply for the financing of courses.

I currently hold the qualifications for the carriage of cargo cat. C and CE, as well as transportation of passengers and commodities. I also obtained category C and D driving licence. At present, I am learning to drive trailer trucks. I am also polishing my language skills in Norwegian and English, completed an IT course and upgraded my computer skills.

The most difficult part of the entire career transition programme for me were the theoretical exams for specific qualifications and competences. They involved a whole lot of theory. On the other hand, the nicest thing was that I wasn't stressed out about it. Quite the contrary, when I recall my work at the opera, I see it as a streak of constant stress. And as a driver, I don't have to face any stress or pressure. This is very important to me.

During the transition process, I received a lot of support from everyone engaged in the Programme. I especially appreciated the fact that the team supporting me was very flexible and took into account my personal features, for example the fact that I was still working in Norway and could only stay in Poland only from time to time. In case

of any questions or problems encountered throughout the transition process, we always looked for a solution together.

I think that the Programme gave me a fresh start in my life. I feel as if I was writing a new chapter. I finished writing a book entitled *Ballet*, now I am writing a book entitled *Driver*. Besides the transition, I am still who I was before. And I have absolutely no sense of loss. At first, it pained me that my dance life is over. Now I am grateful to fate.

My message to other dancers is, “There is really nothing to be afraid of. The most important thing is to start doing something new. Just take the first step.” Sometimes dancers aren’t certain whether they can cope with the change. Sometimes they feel that the opera is where the world ends. But it doesn’t. The world is really huge. I know that everyone is different. Everyone tackles change differently. And I wish all the dancers to persevere in the process.

To the dancers who are at the beginning of their professional careers I would say that dancing is like sports: it’s a beautiful profession, albeit a short-lived one. If I were them, I would think about what to do when dancing ends and what else makes their heart jump besides dancing. The sooner they start thinking about it, the better.

I know that everyone is different. Everyone approaches change differently. I wish fellow dancers perseverance.

I consider myself a lucky man. I regret nothing in my life and I wouldn’t change anything.

# Sandra Kruk

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**A dancer, sales representative/sales and customer contact specialist, Sandra Kruk graduated from the State Ballet School in Bytom. She danced professionally for over 20 years at Opera Nova in Bydgoszcz. Her preferred roles were those bursting with emotion, e.g. in *The Captive Mind*.**

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I currently work as a Management Board Representative for Document Solutions at a company that deals with leasing printing equipment. My job consists of contacting various institutions and seeking new business clients. Every day, I have to contact numerous chairpersons at of different enterprises. I work in a friendly, collaborative team and I have a boss who appreciates my continuous learning and development. In my new job, I very quickly moved out of my comfort zone and I am happy about it, it served me well and I feel I made great progress. On the other hand, the self-discipline that I developed as a ballet dancer enormously supports my effectiveness at my present work.

I started to consider career transition directly after the first meeting with the career counsellor provided by the Career Transition Programme. She guided me with her questions and encouraged me to think about





new opportunities. Her psychological support was equally important for me, as I got the sense that there actually was life outside the opera. In the process of working with the career counsellor, I drafted various paths of career transition. Soon, I decided to try something, still being a stage dancer. I embarked on an extra job as a sales representative in a direct sales system.

What drove me was my own eagerness to begin something else than dance. With this first experience, I was sure that being a salesperson and entering into a direct type of contact with people that the job entails was consistent with my personality. Nevertheless, I knew that ultimately I would rather not be a saleswoman in direct sales, but a sales representative in some company. I decided to develop a career transition plan and submit my application for a scholarship that would support my education in this regard. I have always dreamt about university studies, and now it finally became possible. I quit opera and changed my job to have time to study and to gain new experience. I combined sales courses with sales practice, which was very helpful and, in fact, crucial. I would not have fully benefited from the courses were it not possible for me to implement the acquired knowledge into practice at once.

A year ago, I was employed in a new company. Looking at my past and present knowledge, I can see that my competencies increased by at least 100%. I remember how scared I was of computers at the moment of submitting the application. And now, the computer is my everyday tool – I tally printouts, make compilations in Excel, etc. I love meeting new people. I like being inspired by those who achieved more. I like to ask how they have managed to get that far. I learn from them.

I am very happy that with the Career Transition Programme the dancers are given another chance and that I am one of those who could benefit from the Programme. The fact that such a Programme was created was like winning a lottery.

The career counsellor supported me during the entire transition process – she steered me towards valuable ideas and inspired me, thus making my choices and decisions easier whenever I felt uncertain of anything.

I believe that in the career transition process, it is important to be attentive to everything that happens around us and to give yourself a chance. I was offered my new job owing to an incidental conversation at the university. My boss hired me even though I had almost no experience outside the opera and that my education was only related

to dancing. I recall that when after the trial period he asked me if I was willing to stay, I was surprised – I was not expecting a question like this, but rather a mere assessment. Instead, someone took my opinion into account and enabled me to choose.

I feel appreciated in my present job. I am aware that my opinion is important for my boss and my colleagues. I feel well in the business I got to know, I have a sense of security and belonging. I became a dancer out of pure passion, it is impossible to carry on without passion in this profession, which calls for numerous sacrifices. It is hard to quit something you love so much. We also tend to think that we will not pull through, and we are very critical to ourselves. Today, I believe that such way of thinking limits us a great deal.

Entering the open job market I had to learn a lot. I can say that the market “repaid me” – I learnt many things about myself. At work I hear that I “illuminate the sales department” and that my sense of humour and the way I collaborate is appreciated.

For me, the most difficult part of the career transition process was the decision to pursue it, to start working on the application. But the moment I began the process – I got a second wind and I am sure that if I were to do it one more time, I would not hesitate.

I am also of the opinion that it might be much more difficult for dancers to opt for career transition since they do not know life outside opera. However, once they decide, it is going to happen.

I would like to tell other dancers not to focus on any single thing but to start looking for new opportunities and new passions, because eventually they will have to stop dancing one day. I really knew next to nothing about myself the moment I initiated my career transition process – I was at the very beginning of search for new interests. If you enter such a process it is good to read books on different topics, take online courses and take up new activities, because it is very important to have a choice. I regret that no one has told me this earlier in my life.



## Radosław Lak

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**Radosław Lak currently works as a professional driver. A graduate of the Feliks Parnell Ballet School in Łódź, he was a dancer with the Muzyczny Theatre in Łódź and Muzyczny Theatre in Poznań.**

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I had no difficulty deciding to retrain for another profession – I was 42 and knew I would not be able to dance for much longer. At the end of my stint with the Muzyczny Theatre in Poznań, I realised that health issues would slowly but inevitably prevent me from dancing at the highest level.

Initially, I began to seek new opportunities and took first steps towards becoming a professional driver. I completed several courses, and it turned out I developed a real knack for the profession, because I simply liked driving. I resolved to become a professional driver. In the meantime, I had also learned about the new scholarship programme of the National Institute of Music and Dance. Aided by my career counsellor, I filled out an application and received funding to cover my subsequent professional training. I passed each exam flying colours and gained a range of qualifications in the process. I learned to drive an 18-m



vehicle. I also trained to drive buses and tank trucks, which means I am thoroughly prepared for the new job. On top of that, I completed a first aid training, which I think should be mandatory for anyone to enable them to help others when needed.

In the course of the application process, I was positively surprised by my counsellor's approach – she was genuinely interested with my professional and personal background. It was all of great importance for me when choosing my prospective career. Providing for the family and securing my near and dear is my priority, and it helped me improve my learning curve. The counsellor not only helped me to fill out the scholarship application form but also suggested alternative career opportunities. Our conversations kept me motivated; I am happy I was able to benefit from the help provided by the Institute and the staffers who oversaw the project. They were true pros through and through. Also upon my counsellor's suggestion, I began to learn German. I am now planning to continue to study the language in order to help me work in Berlin on weekdays, and spend weekends with my family in Poznań.

As of now, I am due for an orthopaedic operation, following which I am hoping to start working as a professional driver in Poland or Germany. Luckily, in my new profession it is the work that seeks out people, and not the other way round. Thus, I think I will not face great trouble looking for employment. I am sure I will be able to provide for my family. I am also convinced that the job will bring me much joy, as did my international tours with the theatre: not only will I like it but I will also get paid. And I know I have what it takes to do it right.

Each of us is different, but I would advise dancers to plan ahead and pursue new qualifications as quick as they can. They should make a good use of the transition programme rather than keep pondering over vague alternatives. The world is changing, and we have to adapt to the fact.

## Michał Łabuś

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An owner of a hair salon and hair stylist, Michał Łabuś is a certified dancer of the Association of Polish Stage Artists (ZASP) and holder of a degree in public administration. He is also a dance instructor and educator. From 2003 to 2007, he was associated with the Capitol Musical Theatre in Wrocław. A laureate of the “VIVA Selections Dance Academy” programme, between 2008 and 2015 he was a member of Izadora Weiss’ Baltic Dance Theatre and the Baltic Opera in Gdańsk, where he performed as a soloist. In 2010, he was awarded the Mayor of the City of Gdańsk Award for Young Creators in the field of culture. He is the author of choreographies for numerous dance pieces, including *Uwikłani / The Entangled*, produced as part of the Scene for Dance program, *You Are My Sister* at the Roma Musical Theatre and *The Legend of Kalina Jędrusik*, a final concert of the 27th Stage Songs Review. He has performed at numerous festivals in Poland, Germany, Thailand and Turkey. In 2014, in the November issue of *Dance Magazine*, he was selected by critic Graham Watts as one of the best dancers in Europe in the 2012/2013 season. Since January 2015, he has focused on his original work, in which he collaborates with Poland’s leading dancers, yielding such pieces as *Radio Żelaza / Iron Radio* and *Refugees Testigo Documentary*, developed with Dzikistył Company and produced as part of the Gdańsk Dance Festival. He also collaborated with the Musical Theatre in Gdynia, performing in the musical piece *Notre Dame de Paris*.

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I currently run my own hair salon, which I opened six months after completing the retraining process. It was a bold yet well-considered decision. When planning my career transition, I knew that the path I was taking

would be very intense and exhausting. I assumed that I would become a hairdresser in the shortest possible time. Of course, this involved many sacrifices; in my case, it meant intensive study, to which I devoted all my time. I honed the newly acquired skills I and shadowed more experienced trainers. I was meeting people, building a network of contacts and learning not only how to do perfect haircuts or colouring, but most importantly how to approach clients and how a hair salon operates.

Initially, acquiring a new profession involved huge sacrifices and physical and mental strain. Early on, I still combined work in the theatre with hairdressing training and learning the ropes of my new profession.

Retraining involves a lot of individual work. I could not simply wait for something to fall into my lap, I knew this even before I decided to change my profession. During training, I not only acquired new skills but also learned all facets of hairdressing, which helped me ease into the new profession. My dream was to open an upscale salon with an individual, holistic approach to working with clients. I have been running the salon for more than 3 years, and I am constantly picking up new things and nurture my thirst for knowledge. Thanks to my hard work, persistence and perfectionism, I managed to attain the highest standard of upscale hairdressing.

Working in my own salon gives me great satisfaction, I am proud of my life path and I am happy to tell my clients about it.

I achieved a lot in my profession as a dancer, I felt fulfilled, I did not want to go abroad, although I was tired of working in Poland. All of this drove me to think what I could do in the future a good few years before I retired from dancing. Of course, I was accompanied by even more uncertainty as to how to establish myself outside the world of theatre. And yet, what was my greatest fear turned out to be my best experience. All of this would not have been possible without the support of my family, professional trainers and fellow trainees, from whom I learned a lot, too. The financial resources obtained through the scholarship enabled me to think about retraining sooner than I had anticipated.

Thinking back to the highlights of my retraining period, I know that I made the best of that time. The biggest pressure came with my first exam, then my first job, where I was not too pleased with the working environment and the overall atmosphere. I felt I could work in a different way, and I kept thinking about what I could do better.



I keep building my professional reputation at all times; I see how many people recommend my services to one another. In addition, I take care of my brand through my hard work. The time of the pandemic was very stressful. It was also a trying time. During the lockdown, clients asked how they could help, offered financial support, and I ended up being fully booked for a month and a half ahead. On the day the salon re-opened, I was working almost from dawn till dusk to serve all the customers.

In hindsight, I can see that settling in in an environment outside the theatre was not as difficult as I initially projected it to be. I know that you cannot doubt yourself or the viability of your own idea. I transferred my passion from dance to hairdressing. My imagination, discipline and commitment also came in handy. Fine craftsmanship is a form of artistry, and as such is in high demand both in Poland and around the world. When choosing my post-dancing profession, I was thinking what would give me stability in both my professional and private life. In addition, it is important to consider what you like to do, what gives you pleasure. It's worth remembering what you liked to do as a child, before dancing took hold of your entire life. Following your heart and intuition is very important, but you also need to analyse the market, ask others what working in a given profession is really like. Before making a decision, you need to be convinced of what you want to do. It's better to take more time and think it all over very carefully than to make a hasty decision.

Just as we aim high in dancing, we should aim for the top shelf in a new job. If you are still dancing and young enough not to be thinking about your future outside of dance just yet, you should look for jobs that meet the highest standards. Where physicality, work and personality are appreciated and where European standards prevail. Do not forget to develop your passions outside of dance. This way, no matter where you are, you will have something to lean back on in the future, a way to access another reality, and a source of inspiration and knowledge. No matter if dancing will be your way of life, your passion or your hobby. The world is waiting for you.

## Beata Macioszczyk

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**Beata Macioszczyk is a dance teacher and educator. She graduated from the Olga Sławska-Lipczyńska Ballet School in Poznań and from the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw with a degree in ballet pedagogy. She started her professional career at the Polish Dance Theatre, where she worked for two artistic seasons, before spending the next 23 years at the Stanisław Moniuszko Grand Theatre in Poznań. In the course of her 25-year dancing career she had the opportunity to work in various dance techniques, perform numerous group scenes and play solo roles characteristic of the ballet repertoire.**

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Having completed the career transition programme, I started working at the State Ballet School in Poznań, where I teach ballet and folk dance. Besides my work at the Ballet School, I am also a teacher at Beata Książkiewicz's Non-Public Dance and Ballet School "Fouetté." The work of a teacher involves a lot of responsibilities and is not easy at all. In retrospect, I can see that in the work of a dancer I was responsible for myself and my condition. At the moment I have to assume the responsibility not only for myself but for the whole group of students collectively and individually. As a teacher, I have to put in a lot of work into each meeting with the students and spend a lot of time preparing lessons, exercises and choreographies. Although on-stage work was much harder in terms of physical



strength and stamina, I consider teaching to be much more demanding. I have never realized how attentive one has to be as a teacher and how many extra duties have to be carried out in addition to the teaching itself.

It was only after the launch of the Career Transition Programme by the National Institute of Music and Dance that I began to contemplate enrolling in a university programme in Warsaw. It seemed to me that since I was a dancer, studying would be simple. I had long dreamed of studying in Warsaw at the University of Music, but it was only when the programme came up that I started to consider it seriously. Before that, I had graduated in pedagogical studies in Poznań, majoring in guidance and counselling pedagogy. When I worked as a dancer, I simply wanted to get a university degree and the combination of working in the theatre, studying in Poznań, and having a family life there seemed to me to be the most sensible and easy thing to do. However, I still lacked a dance element in my education. Completing pedagogical studies in Warsaw was a dream come true and gave me the opportunity to find work in the field that I loved so much.

Frankly speaking, what also stopped me from studying ballet pedagogy was the fact that I had no knowledge of English whatsoever. Thus, an important facet of my career transition project became learning English as a second language. Thanks to the programme funding, I was able to participate in a language course that allowed me to make up for this shortcoming and pass an English certification exam at the end of my studies. Additionally, to boost my chances of landing a job, I also completed a computer course that provided me with computer skills. The knowledge and skills that I gained in the computer course also proved very useful during my ballet pedagogy studies because I had to do my assignments on the computer and submit them by e-mail. Currently, when I look at my teaching profession, I think that I would have failed without these skills.

Had I decided not to take up additional studies and to supplement my computer and language skills, I would certainly have the possibility to stay in the theatre sector in a different capacity. However, the jobs that I was proposed – a wardrobe mistress or a cloakroom attendant – triggered my inner resistance. With a university degree in my hands, I certainly did not want to work as either of these. In addition, these professions come with a greater workload, a lower income and lower professional prestige. I was reluctant to commit to all that, and decided to undertake a more demanding career change.

My career transition was a process. I have the impression that it was not a revolution, but rather an evolution because I am still in the same



environment. The theatre cooperates with our ballet school, so I still operate in a familiar territory. I even had the opportunity to make a guest appearance with my students on the stage that I know so well from my previous occupation. I see my life as a path that leads from being a ballet school student to a dancer and finally to a dance teacher at the same ballet school that I used to attend as a child.

In the very process of gaining new education, the hardest part was the lack of time for myself, family and friends. I attended university classes on weekends, and I also worked towards completing an intensive language and computer course, all of that combined with my professional work and family life. After the preparations for my final exams and thesis, I was very relieved but also satisfied with the fact that I managed to complete my studies.

I feel that I have reached a certain level of maturity both in my personal and professional life. I work with people who used to teach me when I was younger and with whom I worked on stage, and feel safe in this environment.

While preparing for the Career Transition Programme's scholarship application, I wondered many times whether I could choose a simpler and shorter career transition path. In retrospect, I know that being brave and raising the bar always pays off. It is always worth giving yourself a chance. Everyone should choose a path that interests them and do what they have always dreamt of. Dreams are sometimes difficult to fulfil, sometimes you have to take into account your family or your professional and health circumstances. In my case, everything I have done has come in handy. I feel that my career transition project was very coherent and I would not have completed it without my prior professional experience and the skills acquired in the transition process. Now I know that if I had not heeded the suggestions of my career counsellor, my plan would have failed. The counsellor's tips and hints were of huge value since I was unaware of all the opportunities that lay within my reach and that could help me expand my skills.

I have given up my professional stage career but my life goes on. During my studies, I had no time to think about whether my life would change. This made the whole transition process very smooth. As of now, my life is more interesting and different, too. But to effect such a change in your life, you have to plan everything in advance. We can work for as long as we want and our body allows, but we need to consider career transition well in advance.

## Łukasz Marczyński

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Łukasz Marczyński currently works as a professional driver and is considering studying transport and haulage. He graduated from the Opera School in Bytom and made his debut on the stage of the Silesian Opera. He continued his career at the Kraków Opera and at the Musical Theatre in Gliwice. He collaborated with Lacy Darryl Phillips, which led to a year-long tour of Western Europe with the musical *Dirty Dancing*. He also performed in the show *Rock Loves Chopin* around the world, including Shanghai, Cairo, Zagreb, Bucharest, and Zurich. He danced in *Footloose*, *The Nutcracker*, *Hello, Dolly!*, *Chodnik 05* (Pavement 05), *Pinocchio*, *Billy Elliot*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Niedziela w parku z Georgem* (Sunday in the Park with George), *Producenci* (The Producers), *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* (The Manuscript Found in Saragossa), *Skrzypek na dachu* (Fiddler on the Roof) and the musical fairy tale *Kot w butach* (Puss in Boots); he also played the role of the Faun in *The Afternoon of a Faun*.

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Having changed careers, I am mostly satisfied with the financial terms, although I was not aware of the true life of a professional driver. Some may wonder why I decided to become a professional driver as a professional dancer, but along the way I have also met drivers with psychological, medical and other qualifications.

While financially rewarding, being an international driver also means being locked in the cab of a lorry for two or three weeks at a time. The lorry becomes your home, you sit most of the time, and on top of that the loneliness is very stressful and overwhelming. Mental stress 13–15 hours a day, overnight stays in parking lots. After this experience I changed my job, I drive eight hours a day and then go home. That's how I changed my job, because as a driver, I can feel safe and be sure that I will always have a job.

Another problem is getting used to working in a team when you are surrounded by people. I also miss the physical exercise. Despite these drawbacks of my new job, I feel that the sense of freedom and the financial rewards are satisfying enough. That's a great comfort for me as a father.

Thanks to my career transition, it was not difficult for me to leave the stage because I already had a strong desire for a change and a better financial situation. However, it was not easy to combine work with the whole transition process, but if you know what you really want, you can do it.

The process of career transition and the first few months at my new job were a tough school of life. I learned a lot about myself. I feel like that was the beginning, and now everything is moving faster and faster, like a snowball. One idea after another is coming at me. As for further study, you have not heard the last from me. I am now considering studying transportation and freight forwarding, as my experience as a driver and my observations of the whole process could be very useful. I already have the opportunity to self-finance my next career move.

I am also thinking about starting my own business. Until I was 30, I did not think about the future. Theatre was my lifestyle, I did not feel like I was working. I could not imagine a life beyond theatre.

I am glad that the Career Transition Programme is out there and supports the retraining process. It helps those who may be afraid of a new future or new places. Anything new brings new opportunities. It's as simple as that – there are new opportunities and it's worth taking advantage of them.







# Tomasz Moskal

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**A dance teacher specialising in contemporary dance, Tomasz Moskal graduated from the State Ballet School in Warsaw. From 1992 to 1995 he danced in the Grand Theatre Łódź. Later, between 1996 and 2001, he danced in the Polish Dance Theatre directed by Ewa Wycichowska. As a contemporary dancer, he also cooperated with Melissa Monteros from Canada and the Rosie Kay Dance Company from the UK.**

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In the past, I used to think that the “only” thing I could do is dance. Now I know that I am capable of many things. I work as a dance teacher and choreographer as this is also part of my curriculum. But I also delve in music – I search for and compose interesting music pieces, which I edit and mix, in order to get what I want in terms of music for a particular dance piece or choreographic sequence. For many years, music-making was just my hobby, but now it is a vital part of my work that deeply enriches my teaching.

I have always felt that teaching is my mission and I put a lot of passion and energy into it. I feel that I am in the right place: teaching is my life, just as dancing used to be in the past.

I find it hard to point when it was exactly that my thoughts veered into the area of career transition. Before decided to focus on teaching, I had felt for a long time that teaching and sharing my experience were my mission. My first practical experience in teaching comes from 1998,



and I think that was the very beginning of me seriously considering teaching as my second career path.

Today, I hold a degree in ballet education studies and I teach contemporary dance at the State Ballet School. I find my teaching job deeply fulfilling and stimulating my development on various levels.

I very much appreciate having completed my education studies. Linking work with studies is never easy. It was hard for me to take up studies, but I also knew that the diploma is not my final goal. I wanted to develop my potential and I have completed this task. By completing the ballet education studies I have broadened my professional competence and increased my creative and teaching potential. During my studies, I was able to combine my diverse practice, experience and knowledge in a great way.

I received the offer to work at the State Ballet School just before I graduated from the university studies. It was an invitation to conduct classes for the last grade, including the 9th grade with its final exam and a final gala, which meant creating choreography and music for the final show. I knew that I was being thrown in at the deep end but at the same time I felt ready to take on the challenge. I had a great desire to teach, support and help the students. I get a lot of satisfaction from the fact that I can accompany young dancers in their development.

It is important to note that the session I had with the work coach proved to be very helpful in my career transition process. We were both looking for various options for the further development of my career. That interview also helped me to understand certain things that were important to me, and it was an important part of the process.

I have this feeling that for me, career transition came naturally. Being a professional dancer was the first and very important stage of my professional life. Now, I have opened a new chapter, which is equally important to me. I have been enjoying both of these stages a lot.

If I were to send my message to dancers considering career transition and to dancers who are at the very beginning of their dance career, I would say, “Find different ways of developing your potential, stay inspired by learning new things, look for different passions. It is so important to be able to look into yourself, to talk to others, not to lock yourself in your own perspective; to go out into the world, find new paths outside of the artistic environment that is familiar to you. You can always find inspiration for further growth in different places.”

## Jacek Niepsujewicz

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Jacek Niepsujewicz is a trained barber and hairdresser, currently building his own brand in Norway. He is also a former dancer, choreographer, cultural animator, and member of the Rozbark Dance and Movement Theatre in Bytom and the Rozrywki Theatre in Chorzów. He performed in over 40 professional performances in Poland and abroad (including collaborations with Ohad Naharin, Jo Strømgren, Ewa Wycichowska, Jacek Przybyłowicz, Anna Piotrowska, Michał Znaniecki, Monika Strzępka and Paweł Demirski duo). He is a multiple scholarship holder in the field of dance and creator of original performances awarded at the festivals soloDuo (Budapest), Shakespeare Festival (Gdańsk), Musicalmuto Film Festival (Naples), Open Your Mind Festival at the Laban Theatre (London), Montgomery International Film Festival (Washington).

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Dance has been my whole life. A passion thanks to which I could not only live out my need to be on stage, but which also allowed me to be very mobile. I have the soul of a globetrotter. I assume that you only have one life. When I decide to travel, I pack my suitcase and I am in a new place. As a dancer, I have travelled this way from company to company, city to city, country to country.

When I was thinking about career transition and retraining, I was looking for a mobile, versatile profession that would allow me to work anywhere in the world. This was a priority for me when choosing a new

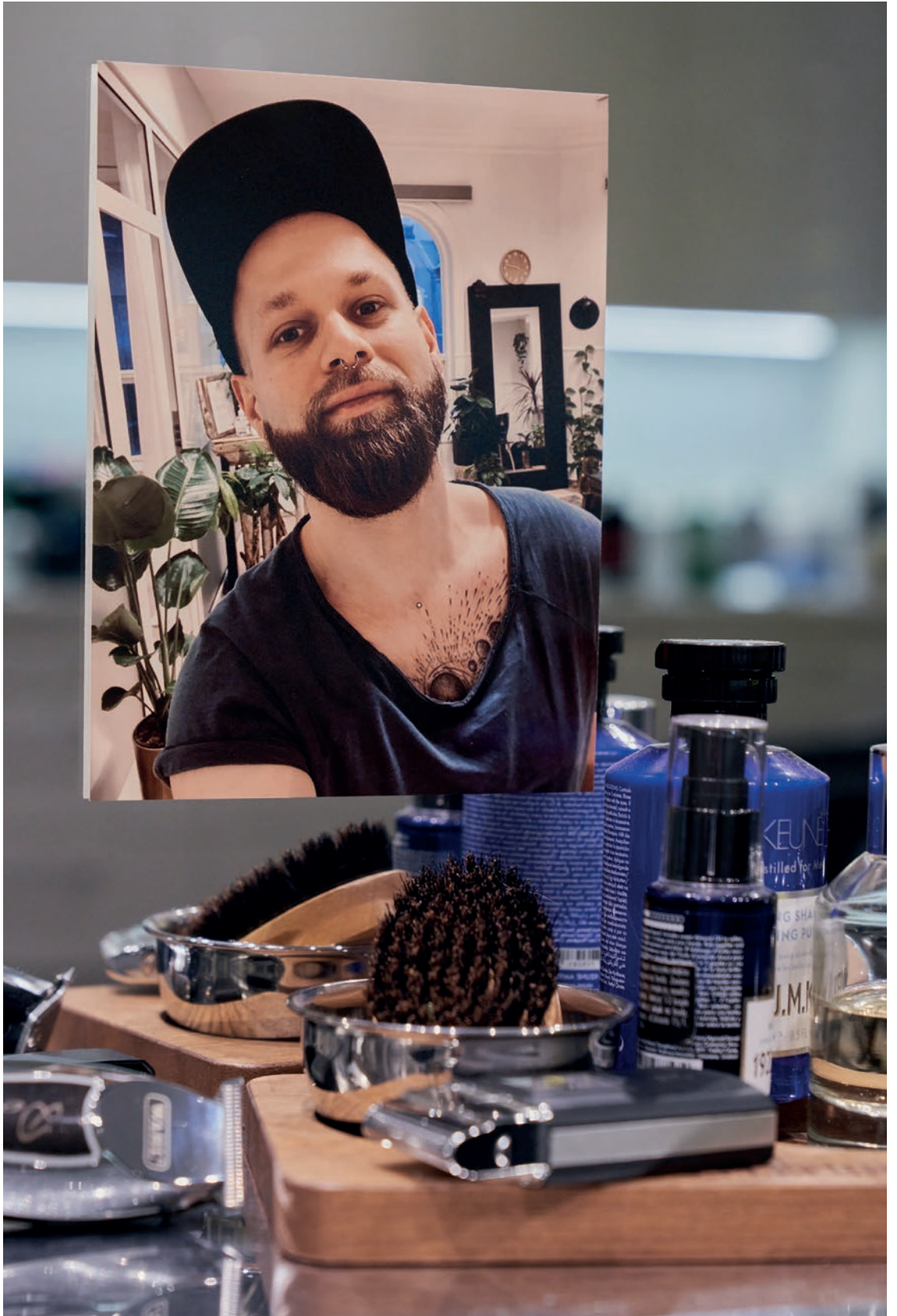
career path. I became a hairdresser and within two years I had already lived and worked in Wrocław, Gdynia, Amsterdam and Norway, which is where I live now, and for the first time in a dozen years, I am getting more and more rooted. In fact, I am about to open a salon. After arriving in Ålesund and working from home for four months while accepting clients in my living room, I decided to take the risk and open a business in Norway.

Why Norway? I wanted to visit friends and found myself here at the proverbial last minute before Norway closed its borders for fear of the spread of COVID-19. I got stuck in this small town, although my final destination was Oslo. I liked the country and did not feel the threat of the pandemic and the ever-present fear of getting infected here. I also liked the fact that the demand for beauty, hairdressing, and barbering services here is huge and this branch is thriving. I can see how much potential is here. I know I have a great opportunity to grow my business and my skills and abilities.

As a dancer, I know that one never stops learning and gaining new experience. Whether it is dance or any other profession. I know first-hand how important it is to learn the basics, continue your education and learn about different places and ways of working. You have to keep improving all the time, just like in dance. I started learning Norwegian, although it's not really essential in my line of work. All Norwegians speak English, which is the language in which I communicate with my clients.

When I started my career, I worked for someone else, but now I work for myself and in my own name. This is especially important in a country like Norway, where the best advertisement is a recommendation from a satisfied customer. Word of mouth works better here than Facebook!

Still, it took me a few years to leave the comfort zone of a steady full-time salary at the theatre. I am no exception when I say that a serious injury that took me out of the profession for a whole year was an impetus to think about the future. I had time to focus on something completely different than dancing, to stop thinking about art. I asked myself how I could invest my time and energy well so that I would be independent and mobile in the future. I decided to go to a reputable hairdressing school and gain professional qualifications. Earlier, when I was still injured, I tried my hand at hairdressing by training with friends and acquaintances. These early experiences convinced me that this profession would be my dream job.



That's right, it all started with a dream. You need to listen to yourself and not be afraid of your ambitions. It's easier to live when you have a passion and it's worth investing in. You also need to be brave. When you change, you lose something, but you can gain just as much or perhaps even more. In life, as in dance, nothing is simply handed to you, you have to earn it.

I exited the bubble called "theatre and dance" but my artistic ego still craves satisfaction. And to be honest, nothing can replace our need to completely expose ourselves onstage.

I work professionally, but from time to time I participate in dance projects. Why do I do that? To clear my head and change my perspective on everyday life. You could say that I work hard as a hairdresser all year round just to dance once a year. Like any other person with a stable income, I pursue my passion in my free time. I have become a "normal" person with an artistic flair for dance. It may sound funny, but I'm fascinated by this new chapter in my life.

## Elżbieta Niezgodzka

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**A dance pedagogue, fitness instructor, leisure animator and dancer, Elżbieta Niezgodzka is a graduate of the State Ballet School in Łódź. She began her career at the Łódź Grand Theatre and continued at the Łódź Musical Theatre. Her stage career spanned 18 years; as a soloist, she danced the main parts in the *Gypsy Baron* and the *Flittermouse*. She toured Germany, Austria, Belgium and Scandinavia.**

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In my current capacity as a dance pedagogue, I teach at the State Ballet School in Łódź, where I am also a form teacher. My professional experience includes working with children and the youth, as well as leading various dance groups. Over the years I have also gained substantial practical experience in working with adults and seniors, among whom I have promoted “50+” gymnastics. I appreciate each of these different occupations. The very fact that they are different from each other allowed me to develop different competencies and assets.

After a dozen or so years at the Musical Theatre, I began to consider retraining for another job. The decision was prompted by the closure of the company’s seat due to the general renovation of the



Musical Theatre. I saw that as an opportune moment to move into administrative and office work. I thought that I would like the job and be happy with it. Over time, it turned out not to be a job that inspired me and helped me live as actively as I had used to. I had no idea what to do under the circumstances.

It was then that I met with the career counsellor within the framework of the Career Transition Programme for Dancers. I remember, how the counsellor spoke in a soft and pleasant voice, asking me simple questions that allowed me to look deeper into myself. I felt as if my guardian angel was standing behind my back, saying, "You can do other things in your life, you can do the things you like." I realized that it was never too late. I was very glad that a Career Transition Programme for Dancers exists and that I was given a chance to meet a competent person able to guide me through the transition process. It all made me feel valuable and needed again.

Obtaining the Career Transition Programme scholarship enabled me to complete my qualifications. I could close one chapter of my life quietly and open a new one. My career transition began with dance pedagogy studies. I was also looking for additional courses to broaden my skills and abilities related to bodywork, so I went to fitness, pilates and healthy spine classes. This allowed me to enter my profession step by step. This gradual process also enabled me to notice the wide range of competences and skills that I have at hands. And when I finally began leading different groups, I knew that this was my path.

When I was studying at the university, the Ballet School offered me to be a teacher there but I chose the stage career. However, I remembered that already as a child I used to dream of being a teacher. Dreams can come true, and mine did so thanks to the help of the career counsellor and the Headmistress of the Ballet School in Łódź, who recognized my potential, trusted me and offered to cooperate. Now I know that I also owe this change to myself, my perseverance, courage and diligence. I do the things I like and that are my passion. It is as if a new wind is blowing in my life now. And just a few years ago I thought that nothing else would happen in my life...

I have experienced a beneficial change. This change, this programme, has allowed me to develop myself intellectually and physically. I think of myself differently. I have discovered a lot of potential within myself and my mind has opened up. I am more self-confident and more courageous, and fulfil my dreams. I am



also more open to people, to relationships, I have learned to listen to people. I used to think that the only person who was right was me. Now I am more humble. I have managed to spread my wings and I hope I will keep soaring high for a long time. I have plans that I want to accomplish...

I should also mention that my children were a great support in the whole career transition process. It matters to me to hear that they are proud of me and that they see me as a role model.

Of course, my farewell to the stage was difficult. Sometimes I look at my photos from the past and feel nostalgic. But I know that a professional dancer cannot stay onstage forever, this profession has its time – short and beautiful. I'm glad to have been engaged with such an interesting profession.

And if I were to send a message to other professional dancers I would say, "Do not be afraid to realize your dreams! Even if things don't work out the way you want them to, new doors can always open for you. Don't forget that each and every person you meet on your way can completely change your perspective. Keep your motivation high and always work hard, since nothing comes easily. You have to invest a lot of work and effort. But the more effort you put, the greater the satisfaction."

To those who are at the beginning of their career as a dancer, I would say, "Look for another career path besides dancing right away. Nowadays, openness, multi-professionalism, as well as the ability to learn and expand one's skills, are important. This also applies to us, dancers."

# Jacek Nowosielski

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Jacek Nowosielski is a manager of culture. He graduated from the Ludomir Różycki Ballet School in Bytom. He also completed MA studies at the Department of Music Education of the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw, majoring in dance. He spent the first years of his artistic career working as a dancer of the Łódź Grand Theatre and Łódź Musical Theatre. From 1985 through the end of his stage career in 2016, Nowosielski was tied to the Gliwice Musical Theatre, where he worked as a ballet soloist, choreographer, assistant choreographer, and a longtime ballet ensemble pedagogue and manager. Since 2000, Nowosielski has worked at the Post-secondary Vocational Vocal and Ballet School in Gliwice, where he gives lectures on dance art and, since 2017, holds the post of the School's Executive Director. As theatre director, choreographer, scriptwriter, lyricist, composer and performer of his own compositions, he also realised numerous students' graduation performances and occasional concerts. As a choreographer, he co-operates with institutional theatres and amateur dance and theatre companies for children, teenagers and seniors. Aside from those, he also makes appearances as an MC, actor, vocalist, dancer and performer in operetta and musical repertoire and during occasional concerts and cultural events.

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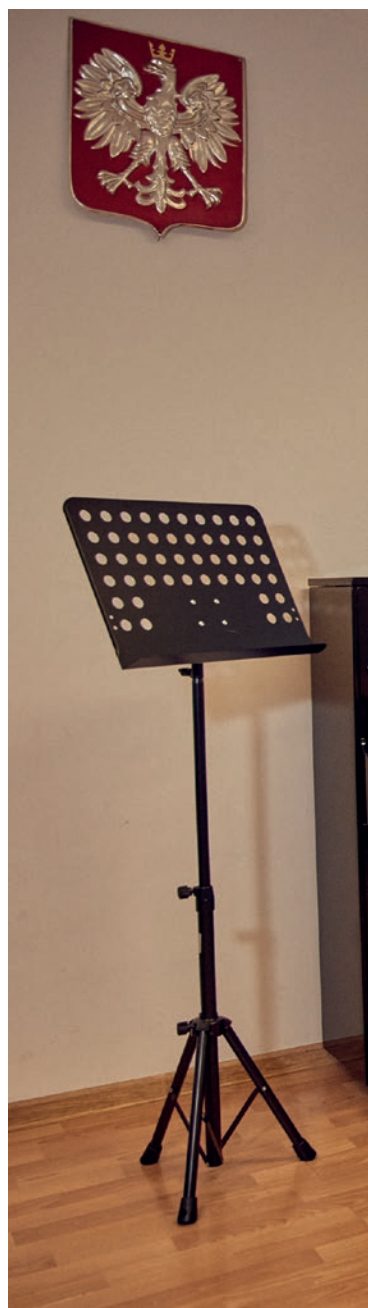
During their artistic career, a dancer functions to a various degree under permanent pressure of keeping their body and mind in top-notch condition. They undergo various stressful situations related to the specific aspects of the dance profession. At the peak of their stage career, the dancer is aware of possessing the required level

of motor skills and overall body condition. However, at the end of their stage career, the dancer notices that their physical capacity deteriorates. Of course, the period of peak physical aptitude of each dancer is different, it depends on the repertoire and its intensity, and is dictated by the professional specificity of the theatre that the dancer works in. In any case, sooner or later, one has to realise that they are past their stage career prime. The moment you realise that your beautiful yet fleeting career has come to an end is the saddest and the most difficult part of it all. That's why we should evaluate our capabilities and resources at the right time and start planning our professional future as soon as possible.

In the period when I was employed simultaneously in the Musical Theatre in Gliwice and took up the job of a teacher in the Post-secondary Vocational Vocal and Ballet School in Gliwice, no higher education degree was required. Currently, it is a formal requirement, and as such it has largely influenced my plans to develop and improve my professional qualifications.

At the age of 40 and working as a manager, choreographer, ballet teacher of the aforementioned Musical Theatre in Gliwice and a vocal and ballet studio teacher, I noticed a certain change in myself at the time. Despite many years of stage practice and despite having a large load of professional experiences, which provided me with rich resources and adequate professional patterns, I noticed a dose of uncertainty sneaking into my professional life. I started doubting the decisions I was making and the correctness of the words I was uttering. I also started doubting my own competences in relation to the art of dance and its education. This uncertainty did not stem from the fact that someone was accusing me of something. I was the only source of my uncertainty and it made me feel bad. I knew that I had to supplement my practical experience with theoretical knowledge and teaching methodology. I took up MA studies in dance at the Department of Music Education of the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw. The knowledge I acquired there increased my professional competences as a dancer, ballet manager, choreographer and teacher. Extending my knowledge of pedagogy and psychology allowed me to look at the complexity of human psyche in a different way. This became very helpful both in my work with teams, but also in my individual work.

It is no secret that the reality of the contemporary cultural market, encompassing both the professional and amateur dance/theatre scene and art education, requires managing competences. One





has to be a culture manager to be able to work professionally in the field of culture. With that in mind, I have applied to the National Institute of Music and Dance for a scholarship. At the age of 53, I started post-graduate studies at the University of Economics in Katowice, at the Faculty of Culture Management. I completed these studies in 2017. I had to combine studying, working professionally and spending time with my family, which was hard to do time-wise. But today, I can openly say that there was not a single lecture that I regret attending. I am also very grateful for all the highly informative meetings, conversations and discussions that I carried out with the lecturers and colleagues from my study group. And most importantly, I can say that as of now, I am making a full use of the theoretical knowledge in the field of art institutions and art schools management, which I acquired at the University of Economics in Katowice.

I am a strong supporter of the vocational school education model and its trajectory, Student – Apprentice – Master, with the lattermost continuously learning and honing their workshop. I hope that the example of my professional development will motivate both young and mature dancers in planning their professional future and making decisions that concern it. The fact that I took up complimentary education at a rather mature age, and the fact that I continue expanding my theoretical and practical knowledge, brings to mind the well-known saying ofl “It is never too late to learn.”

## Sergii Oberemok

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**Sergii Oberemok currently works as an administrative worker. After his graduation from the Kyiv Ballet School, he began his career in Ukraine at the Kyiv Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre for Children and Youth. He then danced at the National Opera of Estonia (Tallinn). He continued his career in Poland, at the Wrocław Opera, where he reached the position of First Soloist. He danced the most important ballet parts in the operatic repertoire. He has also worked with the Łódź Grand Theatre and the Silesian Opera in Bytom. For several years he also conducted ballet classes for children and adults and worked as a coach for students prepping for ballet competitions. After finishing his career as a professional dancer, he graduated in administration.**

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In June 2021 I terminated my adventure with professional dance. Although I am still a dancer, I am already gradually moving in the direction of my administration studies. Previously, while still a dancer, I acted as a ballet inspector for three years. This was my first attempt at my future job in administration.

Right now, I have just graduated from administration studies and I will be looking for a job in the field of public administration or human resources. I am planning to move to Warsaw. My professional aspirations have motivated me to finally apply for Polish citizenship.





But let's go back to where it all started. My adventure with career transition started with a meeting with the representatives of the National Institute of Music and Dance in 2016. They visited our theatre to present the career transition programme of dancers run by the Institute. At the time, the company was undergoing some transformation and I began to think about what I would do in the future. I was also slowly realising that my efficiency was changing and the injury I was struggling with only accelerated this process. It was like an alarm bell. It was no longer just my passion or ambition that were at stake but also my health.

I decided to join the programme and enrol in university studies. I had always been fond of learning and after many years I recalled that energising feeling of learning new things. But it wasn't all that easy: first of all, I had to get acquainted with how the studies were organised. I had to learn the difference between lectures, seminars lessons, passing grades and exams. This seems obvious now, but at the beginning, it was a great novelty. The Polish language also turned out to be a problem. I was convinced that after so many years spent in Poland I knew the language and was able to communicate in Polish quite well. The official, formal and bureaucratic language caught me by surprise; it was quite difficult to master, as in everyday life I had hardly come across this kind of Polish.

It is quite amazing that at the beginning it seemed to me that I was the only one who sometimes did not understand what the lecturer was talking about. Everyone around me was able to follow the lecture and I was hesitant to ask questions. Eventually, I dared to pose one, the lecturer started to explain and suddenly a lot more questions started coming from the students. It turned out that other students did not understand either, but they were afraid to ask questions. I felt satisfaction and I became convinced that one should not feel ashamed to ask questions. One should be ashamed not to ask them when in doubt. This was the most important lesson I learnt during my university studies.

A very important recollection from this period is the defence of my MA thesis. It was a source of considerable stress and responsibility. Contrary to my earlier concerns, the discussion with the exam committee was very friendly and although I expected a lower score, I received a very good one. I am aware that it was not only my doing. The support I received from my wife and my mother-in-law was crucial; they believed in me, supported me and helped organise my daily life in such a way that I could fully commit myself to learn and acquire new professional skills.



My university experience reassured me that retraining for a new professional life is possible. However, the most important issue is not to ignore it, and to understand in time that a moment of physical decline is imminent; to realise and accept the fact that once upon a time you used to dance much better and that this time will not come back. It is better to come to this conclusion by yourself. When you know that it is your time to quit. It is very important to confront this on your own terms. The smaller the theatre and the smaller its company, the more difficult it is to cast a mature dancer in a role where age and acting and life experience are important.

In retrospect, I think it would have been better if I had started studying much earlier, while still a young dancer. In my profession working with the body, an injury can happen any time, and then it is important to have a backup plan. Some of my friends are afraid to take part in the Institute's Career Transition Programme because they are still dancing full time and they do not envisage their life off stage. However, five years is an eternity in the dancing profession and this interval allows you to prepare gradually for the life off stage. At the age of 35, there is no time for waiting and you can also change your profession to something connected with dancing. You must remember, however, that although as a dancer you have already accomplished everything, you are still young enough to be successful in other professions.

## Aneta Pająk-Cwojdzińska

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**Aneta Pająk-Cwojdzińska currently teaches classical dance and coaches young figure skaters. Her dancing adventure began at the State Ballet School in Bytom. She danced in the Silesian Opera for twenty-five years and fulfilled her dream of working as a dancer. In the meantime, she started working with children and passed on her knowledge and experience to the youngest ballet students. Working with children gave her the impetus to obtain a teaching license.**

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My other activities, aside from dancing, fell in a difficult time of lockdown. Suddenly, dance, theatre, and children's classes had to go online. We all tried to adapt our activities to the remote mode. I keep dreaming of teaching in the ballet studio at the theatre again. Due to the pandemic, I lost the customers that had I gained with the support of the theatre, as well as the master classes, the open classes that had given children the opportunity to dabble in dance and participate in auditions. It is a great shame.

In June 2020, I managed to organize two concerts where I was involved as a set designer, director, teacher and choreographer. In the following months, everything went online. I even recorded practice videos on YouTube, which are still online today. Professionally,

it was important for me to continue working in sports clubs. I ran classes for artistic gymnastics practitioners and worked with young skaters. Fortunately, those clubs were still able to operate, so I had the opportunity to work with kids in the classroom, not just online.

I thoroughly enjoy teaching children, and thanks to the pedagogy course financed by the Career Transition Programme, I am more confident and relaxed in my job. The combination of experience and pedagogical knowledge makes it easier for me to plan my lessons. In addition, completing the course has opened new career opportunities for me. The school where I earned my educational certificate was launching a course in artistic gymnastics and I was offered the opportunity to teach in that area. In this case, my added advantage was the fact that I had completed the course as an artistic gymnastics coach at the School of Sports Championships. Thanks to this course and my newly acquired teaching qualifications, I am now able to teach future female champions.

I know that the effort to gain new qualifications has been worthwhile and will continue to bring benefits in the future. However, the beginning was difficult. I was scared about going into the course. Everyone was younger and more computer-literate. Therefore, any online course was an extra burden for me, and writing the thesis proved to be a real challenge, too. If I had not been convinced that what I was doing was important and that I needed it, it would have been even harder.

It would have been very difficult to end my career as a dancer without a fallback plan, regardless of my financial situation and the financial cost of retraining. What is most important for me is that I still love dancing and love teaching it. I find it mobilizing, important, and challenging. I think it's better to do something you love and open yourself up to new possibilities than to do random things and feel undervalued.

I do not dance on stage anymore, a lot has changed, and yet I still have a very interesting life in which dance continues to play a role. Sometimes, when I listen to classical music, I miss the stage. But I do not feel bad, I do not feel like I am missing anything. I am content.

My friends often ask me how I made it, and I advise them to try something new. I always have to believe that I can do it, that new opportunities are within my reach. Now our lives are different than they used to be, now you have to know how to use a computer, for





example, and you have to learn to ask for help, and then ask for it again. And then yet again, for years on end.

Even if you are still dancing and are young, you should try out, find out what interests you and test yourself so you can think about the future. Not just about a future without dancing, but about the future in general. Then you will find it easier to bid farewell to dancing, and your post-dancing career will likely be more satisfying.

# Robert Rzeźniczak

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**A dancer and pilot, Robert Rzeźniczak spent many years as a soloist in the National Folk Song and Dance Ensemble “Mazowsze.” He worked with the Ensemble for more than a decade, dancing his first concert in August 2003, at the Royal Łazienki in Warsaw. He is an avid enthusiast of dance and flying.**

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I have always done the things I love. I have always loved dancing and it will stay that way, for sure. To resign from one’s lifelong passion is difficult at first, but when you seamlessly switch to another one, the path of transition becomes clear. Still, it does not mean that this process is simple.

I began thinking about starting a new career as early as 2008. At that time, I took up a temporary job that did not involve dancing – i.e., I started working for an airline company, in order to explore the very fresh idea of re-establishing myself in a new field other than dance. I have always liked travelling and driving different vehicles. When I suddenly got the opportunity to find out more about the work of a pilot, it turned out that the very idea of me flying an aeroplane as a pilot and all the activities related to this work resonated with me strongly.

I took more concrete and systematic steps related to career transition in 2013. At that time I began my efforts to obtain professional qualifications and licenses of a professional pilot. I did job market research, took the necessary courses and educated myself by navigating within my financial possibilities and dividing my time between these future career endeavours and my work as a dancer.

The Career Transition Program for Dancers carried out by the National Institute of Music and Dance made it possible for me

to intensify my education and bring it to an end. I have passed the final exams and qualified for the next stage of training, necessary to complete the career transition.

My family and the joy of thinking about a new career is what motivated me to fulfil the transition process.

When I began the process of transition, I felt a passion blossoming inside me – a powerful desire for further development in the new field. I remember very well all the things that followed the moment when I obtained my first aeroplane license: the preparation and implementation of the first flight pass, the process of building relationships with the community of pilots and trainees. I was gaining practical skills and getting to know a new professional environment that fascinated me. At the same time, I had to make sure that this truly was my new path, and that I wanted to pursue it in the future.

Throughout the entire process of transition, it was crucial for me that I was being continuously supported by my family, especially by my wife and parents. They helped me believe that I would achieve my goal as long as I worked hard enough with self-determination. Together with my family, I decided that it was best for me to invest in my personal development. Being a soloist in “Mazowsze” has always been and will always be very important for me. But this is not the end of my work career. Apart from my relatives, I have also received huge support from the people who helped me understand the specifics of my current profession by sharing their knowledge and passion. Furthermore, I should also mention the support I received from the work coach I was able to consult after I had entered the Career Transition Program for Dancers.

If I were to meet other dancers who consider entering the career transition process, I would tell them, “Do not be afraid, build your self-confidence through actions, be aware that you are able to do many things and it is important to devote yourself to new paths and look for a new work career that truly fascinates you.” Each of us, dancers, is different. And we all, at a different point in life, come to the conclusion that we should open ourselves to new paths of development other than dance. To resign from one’s life’s passion is difficult. But you can always change one passion to another, thus investing in the development of the multiple skills you possess.

I would like to thank all the people who accompanied me on my journey. To all the dancers, I wish to say, “Good luck!”







# Katarzyna Sanocka

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A journalist, television presenter, presenter, art historian and dancer, Katarzyna Sanocka graduated extramurally from the State Ballet School in Warsaw. During her education she lived mainly in Cracow, where she was associated with the Cracow Opera for almost twelve years. She is particularly fond of her role of Micaela in the Rachmaninoff-Shchedrin production of *The Tragedy of Don José*; her participation in the performance *Spojrzenia* (Looks) including characteristic dances; and the role of the alter ego of Ariadne in the opera production *Ariadne auf Naxos* to the music of Richard Strauss.

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I can say that my life has undergone a complete makeover. Three years ago I moved to Warsaw. I currently work as a journalist for Polish Television where I cover topics in the fields of culture and art. Opera, ballet, theater are my first priority, but visual arts are just as dear to me. It gives me great pleasure to report on ballet or classical music on television.

These days, it is my great joy to sit in the audience at the Grand Theatre – Polish National Opera and watch the dancers with as much love for dance as ever but without the need to return to the stage as a dancer.

I have always been aware that dance is an art that requires complete dedication. Since ballet school, I have known that there were some dance techniques I was very good at and others that I was naturally less gifted at. In a way, this awareness wired me from the beginning to think about a second career and encouraged me to develop in parallel both in dance and outside of dance. Therefore, regardless of my dance training, I immediately pursued a general high school education and a degree in art history.

I intensified my thinking about career transition when I realised that my experiences, knowledge, and the emotions I wanted to convey to the audience did not go hand in hand with the state of my body. These vectors were going in two different directions. This dissonance intensified as I got older. It was wonderful to go on stage and at the same time I felt trapped: my body began to refuse to obey, and my head awaited another intense evolution.

Deciding what I wanted to do after my dance career was not difficult. While I was still working in the theatre company, I was involved in many projects that led me step by step towards journalism. Nevertheless, I was very afraid of change. It seemed to me that there was no other world outside theatre, even though I functioned quite well outside the stage. My beliefs and fears at the time were paralysing. It took me several years to decide to leave the theatre. We have so many skills as dancers: we are hardworking, disciplined, perfectionist, dutiful, and so we oftentimes think we are not good enough, even good enough to change careers. That was my thought, too.

The moment I ended my career was very moving and liberating for me. I felt like I had ended one career and had another one ahead of me that was just as satisfying... or maybe even more so. The very fact that applied for the scholarship helped me—I was able to specify my interests and I realised how much I already knew about my new career. The meetings with the career counsellor were also helpful—most importantly, I felt like I was not alone. The conversations made me realise that I have the right to not-knowing, that I have the right to feel regret and confusion, that the process of career change takes time and that it's not good to rush it. Everything I have done, every internship, every temporary job has paid off at one time or another; not immediately, as I sometimes had to wait to reap the fruits of my dedication to career transition for 2-3 years.

The coolest thing about my career change was the sense of relief once I realised there was something that gave me the same

satisfaction and joy as going on stage. I see my current career as fruit-picking: everything I learned in theatre as a dancer, over the course of retraining and all my other jobs and activities is paying off in my current job. Looking back, I have a very positive view of my career transition. I have become more confident, and learned that every element of life is important, including rest. I feel professionally fulfilled and consider myself lucky. I left the stage, on the one hand, and entered it, on the other.

I think it can be difficult for dancers to overcome feelings of emptiness when they decide to end their dance career. I think it's worth taking advantage of what is offered by the Career Transition Programme offers, run by the National Institute of Music and Dance and financed from the funds of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. In my opinion, dancers can benefit from their unique experiences. I believe that if someone is an artist and performs on stage, he or she is someone extraordinary, has a great potential as a person and it is worth developing it fully.

To all dancers on the cusp of their career, I would say keep your eyes open, look into what interests you; the sooner the better. They should always feel they have a choice, because that choice does not mean betraying ballet – my love of visual arts began with my fascination with ballet costumes. The fascination was such that I wanted to talk art. This all came true on TV, but it started in the ballet hall.



## Vladimir Seleznev

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An entrepreneur, multimedia specialist, graphic designer and dancer, Vladimir Seleznev graduated from the Rudolf Nureyev Bashkir Choreographic College in Ufa. He worked in eight theatre companies in total, three of which were based in Poland (in Szczecin, Gdańsk, Bydgoszcz). He is especially fond of playing the main part in *Konik Garbusek* (The Humpbacked Horse), which he performed at the beginning of his dance career.

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I feel totally fulfilled as a dancer. Currently, I work as an entrepreneur, multimedia specialist, broadcast engineer and graphic designer. In my work, I approach each of the events and tasks in an artistic way: I treat it as a unique project – a coherent and multilayered performance. I am capable of creating, by myself, a whole new image of a given space through creative use of led screens and graphic design. I cooperate with sound and light engineers, with whom I co-create the setting and manage the technical side of concerts and various commercial and artistic events. I can produce advertising spots and 3D visuals, and create computer animations. I know what the audience of large commercial events needs and due to my versatile competences and abilities, I am capable of providing comprehensive services. Although I have been present in

the market for a rather short time, I can proudly say that I already have regular customers. The quality of service that I represent is already that of an established and respected brand.

I began thinking about changing my professional career after I have turned 30. At that time, dancers were still formally entitled to receive early retirement, and I was fully aware that in my forties I would not be able to continue dancing full-time. At the same time, I didn't want to depend solely on the early retirement pension.

My current occupation and specialisation are the result of a specific process that I went through. Initially, I focused on becoming a sound engineer. I worked as a freelancer in different venues, where I was responsible for the sound system and its operation – I did a lot of concerts and different kinds of events. This experience made me realise that the sound-system and sound-operation market is saturated.

The more I worked, the more I learned about myself and about the specificity of the market, and this knowledge, in turn, made me modify my plans. I focused more on developing my graphic skills and decided to make it my priority. My main goal when I entered the Career Transition Programme for Dancers, was to become an expert in a certain area. I knew a lot about myself and the market; for example – I knew exactly what kind of equipment I needed to develop my new career path. Two factors helped me the most in the career transition programme – my wife, who was there for me when I was making the crucial decisions and choices, and the Programme's career counsellor. In my opinion, if you are going through such a radical change in your life, support and assistance play a crucial role and I was lucky to have one. If you are wondering whether the choices you are making are good or bad and if the goals you are setting for yourself are reasonable, that is the moment when you need that somebody to support you and give you advice.

Within the Career Transition Programme I knew that I was under the supervision of a career transition expert, and I really appreciated that. In hindsight, I think that a dancer should start his career transition at the age of 25, so that after turning 30 they can take up another job. I wish I had gone through the transition earlier. Dancing is beautiful, but life is not just about ballet, there is so much more to do and experience. The world is much bigger, and I think we don't always see it, we are somewhat confined to the world of dance, which prevents us from developing in different directions.

But the things one can do outside the world of dance are amazing and very interesting, indeed.

When I think about myself today, I think that going through the career transition programme brought about a big change in me as a person. I feel more mature. I've always wanted to set up a private business and be fully responsible for myself. Thanks to the career transition programme I managed to improve my financial status. I feel that I'm holding my life in my own hands. Today, I have much more courage to entertain the thought of spending time with my family as well as securing that time. I think that in order to make a change in your professional life, first of all, you have to be brave. You also have to be willing to face the change and to be a hard-working individual.

A pinch of self-confidence won't harm you, either. I think that dancers are afraid of losing their jobs and a steady income. Perhaps in some instances they also think that they can't do much about it all. Maybe they are afraid of taking ownership and thus avoid change. In my opinion, the sooner they dare to start the career transition, the sooner they will find themselves in a new profession. If I were to tell young dancers something, I'd say: "Don't be afraid and think bigger. Don't ever forget that to effect change, you have to expand your skills and your knowledge. Find yourself a hobby, it will help you develop your skills. And be proactive."



# Urszula Solecka

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**Urszula Solecka is an expert in the field of public procurement and personal data protection inspector. Formerly a dancer for nearly 20 years, she graduated from the State Ballet School in Poznań before spending many years as a member of the Poznań Grand Theatre. She recalls with special affection such roles as three and four swans in *Swan Lake* and the best friend of Kitri and Amor in the ballet *Don Quixote*. After her stint with the Poznań Grand Theatre, Solecka joined the Polish National Ballet in Warsaw, where she spent the remainder of her career, performing the company's entire repertoire, both classical and contemporary.**

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I started thinking about career transition around the fourteenth year of my dance career. At that time it began dawning on me that the profession of a dancer cannot last forever because it has its physical and temporal limitations. At that time I didn't think about ending my career but I was more interested in gaining some new perspectives. I was aware that the profession of a dance teacher or a choreographer did not suit me. I was determined to try something different. After a few months of analysing university offers, I decided to study administration at the University of Warsaw. It turned out that I "hit the jackpot." Already in the first year, I received



an award and a scholarship for the best student, which improved my motivation. I completed both my BA and MA studies majoring in “Public Procurement” as this subject seemed interesting to me.

Shortly after defending my Master’s Thesis, I found out that there was a project at the theatre called “Improving the functionality of the Grand Theatre – Polish National Opera in Warsaw” and they were recruiting for a vacant position. Entering the job interview with the then Director of Finance and Development, who supervised the project, was probably the most difficult and crucial decision in my career at that time. With the forebearing National Opera Director behind me, I was able to do the internship as a member of the project team without giving up my employment in the ballet ensemble. After five months I was offered a full time job. It was then that I finally bid farewell to dancing. I guess that my professional transition went quite smoothly. I am fully convinced that it was due to the fact that I had made the right arrangements early enough.

Currently, I am working in the field of Public Procurement, which corresponds to my education. In the meantime, I was also engaged in the Project Team for Human Resources Development, where I learnt about personal data issues. It was during this time that I came into contact with the National Institute of Music and Dance. The meetings and guidance that I received from the Institute’s career counsellor as part of the Career Transition Programme for Dancers proved extremely helpful. Thanks to these meetings I became aware of my interest in the field of personal data management and protection. The stipend provided within the framework of the programme enabled me to complete two postgraduate courses related to the profession of Data Protection Officer. Consequently, when this position became vacant at the theatre, I was a natural candidate to fill it.

Of course, nothing comes by itself. The period of career transition is not an easy one because you have to reconcile your current professional life and set aside some extra time for studying. In my case, I received invaluable help from my husband who relieved me of some household chores and motivated me in moments of doubt.

I think that a dance career is a perfect basis for finding yourself in another, equally interesting profession. The skills we develop from ballet school onwards cultivate in our stage work, such as striving for perfection, being systematic and hard-working, are equally sought after and appreciated on the job market as professional knowledge.

I do believe that for professional dancers the most difficult thing when making the decision about career transition is that they do not always know what to do next, which path to take. Therefore, I strongly recommend consulting programmes that support career transition, such as the one offered by the National Institute of Music and Dance. The earlier, the better.

For me, it was important to “leave the stage” on my own terms. I am very glad that I managed to continue working for the same institution, where I can still meet my ballet friends in the theatre corridors and participate in artistic events even if I am no longer an active performer.

I would tell other dancers to enjoy the beauty of the profession while cultivating different activities and interests because, in the future, these interests and activities might help you find a job equally interesting to dance. And, as we all know, a job that gives pleasure is a source of great satisfaction.

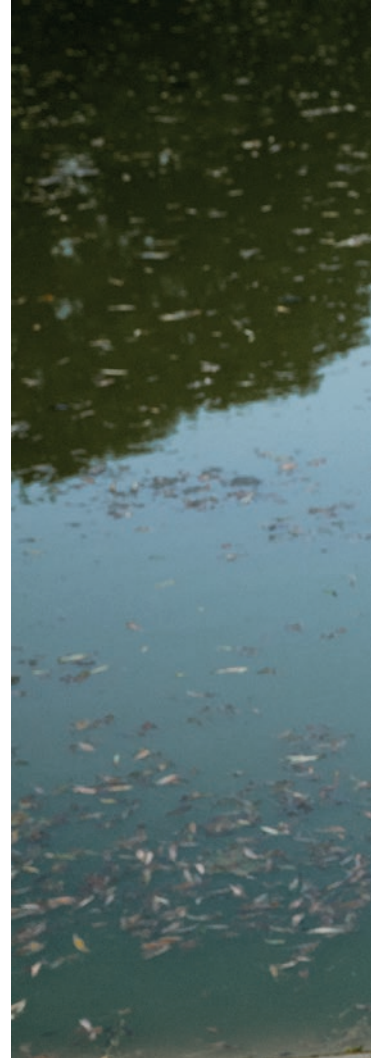
# Sebastian Solecki

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**An IT specialist-software developer and dancer, he performed his first ballet role already during his primary school education, featuring as Prince Albert in the ballet performance of *Giselle* at the Grand Theatre in Poznań. A soloist and coryphée of the Poznań Grand Theatre Ballet and soloist of the Polish National Ballet, he danced a number of leading roles, including John in *Zorba the Greek*, Prince in *The Nutcracker*, Don Basilio in *Don Quixote*, Edmond Dantès in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Prince Siegfried in the *Swan Lake*. He co-operated with numerous theatre companies in Poland and danced at many ballet galas abroad. In 2014 he received the Gloria Artis Silver Medal Award for Meritorious Service to Culture granted by the Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage.**

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I currently work as an IT-specialist. It is a cool and interesting job. I am continuously upgrading my skills in this field. Java programming language is my absolute passion. My educational background in IT is sound: I have completed MA studies and additional qualification courses. I feel strong about my chances in the job market. As a Deputy Manager of the IT Department, I am currently responsible for network administration, computer systems and work management of my division.





I started thinking about career transition 7 years ago. I was aware that I would not work as a dancer forever. It took me one year to come up with a solution as to what other professions can potentially give me satisfaction on a daily basis, both at work and during my studies. I embarked on a journey towards learning myself anew by analysing my characteristics and potential. I noticed that I have a highly analytical mind, which, by the way, was very helpful in dancing. I kept observing my interests and school subjects that I was especially good at as a child (mainly the sciences). I recalled that even as a child I loved computers and made my first attempts at coding data and writing simple algorithms. That made me take up IT studies during my career transition process.

During the transition process, I had a couple of rough patches. The first one was admitting (to myself) that I want to change my profession. The second one came when I began the IT studies – the first year was extremely difficult, I was overloaded with work and I saw how much learning is ahead of me (at that time I asked the theatre director to give me less work in terms of repertoire so that I could both work and study at the same time). And finally, the last and most difficult moment, when, after serious surgery, I finally realised that I have to find a new job in IT because I would not be able to dance professionally again.

I like being challenged and that's why I was able to draw a lot of energy from each exam session I took and each test I managed to pass. I was one of the oldest among the students but at the same time, I was able to achieve much better results than my younger colleagues (and each year my grade point average was much better than theirs). I was motivated, I knew exactly what I wanted.

I must admit that my wife and the way we organised our family life so that I was able to study were of huge support in my transition process.

I got a new job in a new profession already after the first recruitment process that I decided to participate in (I responded to a job ad). After less than 2 years, despite having the shortest tenure among all the employees, I was promoted from a rank and file position to that of a deputy manager of the department. This rapid promotion was the result of my newly acquired knowledge and the skills I had developed as a dancer such as responsibility, reliability, systematic approach and inventiveness. It was thanks to these skills that I managed to breathe fresh air into my department. Many of my ideas have been used and implemented.

In hindsight, I only regret that I did not start the entire career transition process a little earlier, say at least two years earlier. I must admit that after just a few months in my new profession I felt just the way I did at the very beginning of my career as a dancer. I was passionate, energetic, and curious.

I strongly encourage dancers to embrace change. I feel that the career transition process has opened up the world for me. The world of dance is beautiful but also, to a certain extent, a bit hermetic. It is as if the dance community was just a part of a much broader reality, and this reality is huge. In fact, you can do whatever you want. All it takes is your will and courage. The job market is open to everyone. All you have to do is find the things that give you pleasure. That is how it worked for me – with dancing and with my current profession.

If I were to give some advice to dancers who are at the beginning of their professional career, I would say – “Enjoy what you do but be aware that a career of a dancer is short and that 20 years can pass in the blink of an eye. Therefore, I suggest that you start looking for an alternative career path once you have spent 10 years dancing professionally.”





## Jurij Stesew

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Jurij Stesew is a physical therapist. He graduated from a ballet school in Belarus and joined the Gliwice Dance Theatre in 1993. He performed in all premieres of the GDT, i.e., in contemporary ballet performances *Zgubieni w sobie* (Lost in Themselves), *Rzeczy niepokój* (The Unrest of Things), *Chodnik 05* (Pavement 05), in musicals *Footloose*, *42nd Street* and *Ragtime*, as well as in dance shows *Carmen* and *ABBA*. He also made several appearances at the prestigious Sacrum-Profanum Festival in Cracow, featuring in 117 performances including *Carmen* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as in the international project *Vichry*. He worked under the direction of outstanding choreographers, such as J. Niesobka, H. Konwiński, J. Stanek, Z. Rudnicka, J. Badurek, W. Janicki, E. Bogdanovich.

After his theater career ended in 2016, he took up studies at the Academy of Physical Education in Katowice. Having graduated with a master's degree in physiotherapy, he began working at a hospital.

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I have been thinking about career transition for a long time. I sought change and I also felt it is necessary for me because day after day I felt more and more exhausted physically. What? How? Where? When? – these were the questions I kept asking myself for a long time. I then participated in a meeting at the theatre, where the ladies responsible for the Career Transition Programme organised by the

Institute of Music and Dance spoke about the possibility of getting a scholarship for retraining. This meeting sparked a thought that entering the Programme and getting a scholarship could be a good way to get a new profession. I've had a very fruitful discussion with the career counsellor about the pros and cons of a new career planning. After a few meetings, I knew which direction I should take. I chose physiotherapy. The idea to delve into physiotherapy resonated with me because this field is similar to medicine, which has always interested me, and I have always wanted to help people.

The very moment of making the final decision to make the transition was very difficult, but the moment I walked out of the box called "dance" was quite amazing. Everything was different. Different people, different topics, different knowledge and different skills. The first year of the BSc studies was very difficult – I had to learn a lot and combine it with my part-time job. At that time, the help and support of my wife were invaluable. I also felt that the end of the stage career was not really "the end" of my professional life. I felt that I was moving forward and that I was going to get a new profession, which would help me earn money. I felt that I wasn't alone. I knew that a new chapter in my life was just about to open and that I was going to do the things I wanted and liked to do. After all, there was a time when I truly wanted to be a physician.

Having completed my BSc studies, I know... what I don't know. I continue to educate myself and I am planning to attend additional courses. This career transition process reminds me of dancing. It's good to know the basics but you also have to continuously boost your skills. Currently, I am doing an MSc programme, where I have one year left ahead of me. I am also running my private business and I am also working as a fitness coach, dance teacher and physiotherapist in a private medical clinic on a half-time basis. I don't miss dance as much as I thought I would. Maybe because I was satiated with dance as a professional dancer. I also noticed that because of my dance career I had no private life. Nowadays, after the career transition, I have many friends from outside the dance community – we meet regularly and it gives me a lot of satisfaction.

My decision impressed everyone in the dance community surrounding me. Although I could have left my life as it was, I didn't. I walked on and continued to develop myself to change my life. Many people were surprised that at that age I took up BSc studies, where most of the students were much younger than me. And I think that if you are a dancer you are more open and more courageous in dealing

with people. As a dancer, you get used to getting in contact with people of different ages and different cultures. This openness helped me during my BSc studies and it also helps me in my current work. I don't feel the age differences.

The scholarship that I received within the Career Transition Programme helped me afford my studies. I have no idea how my life would have turned out if it weren't for the National Institute of Music and Dance and the Career Transition Programme. I tell this to all the dancers I meet on my path. I also think that young dancers should first dance and make their stage dreams come true. They shouldn't choose their studies immediately after high school, because "that's the way life goes." It is better, if they focus on dance first and think about their profession outside it, later in life and discuss their plans with a career counsellor. If I had participated in such a programme before, I would also have discussed my career plans earlier. I'm glad I got the green light to realize my dreams: the Institute's scholarship enabled me to undertake the BA studies. I also received constant support from the scholarship grantor– I could always write and call the people from the Career Transition Programme to make sure I was going in the right direction. When I completed my bachelor's degree, together with the Programme's career counsellor I drafted a CV that helped me find a job right away. That's a real success.

Working in dance theatre has always brought me a lot of satisfaction. Perhaps that's the reason why, for a long time, I didn't think about what I'd do after my dance career finished. All I knew was that I wanted to do something that I liked. In the past, dance was all I did in life. I don't regret having devoted my life to dance, but now I am more aware of the fact that one should see the world outside dance. When the stage life ends, a new life begins.





## Sabina Szybka

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**Sabina Szybka is a choreographer, dance teacher, folklore studies and Polish culture studies lecturer and dancer. Connected to dance since childhood, her professional life spans a 25-year stage career in the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble. Initially active as a dancer, she went on to become a coryphée and finally took over the position of the soloist. In the last period of her stage career, she worked both as a soloist and assistant to the ballet manager.**

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Dance is my great love and passion. I started dancing at the age of 5 and was an active dancer from that moment on, until I turned 45. Initially, I was associated with an amateur dance group “Nowa Huta,” where my teacher and mentor was Anatol Kocylowski. After graduating from high school, I took up university studies but at the same time, I wanted to continue dancing. At that time I was already sure that I wanted to join the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble. I did the audition and won my place in the group. After that, I decided to quit the university and devote all of myself to dancing. After some time, I also passed the professional dancer state exam.

It's always been important for me to get an in-depth knowledge of what I did. At the same time, I have also always tried to see myself from a broader perspective. That's why, while dancing professionally, I also took up and completed the Qualification Course, the Instructor's Course of Choreography, Cultural Studies, Journalism and Social Communication, as well as Pedagogy (post-graduate studies).

I made the final decision to end my stage career mainly thanks to participating in the Career Transition Programme for Dancers organized by the National Institute of Music and Dance. The Programme helped me formulate the outline of my new career path consistent with my professional plans. The thought of making a change in my life first came to me years ago, when I was 40. I was thinking of studying Pedagogy. I used to dream of becoming a teacher when I was a child, and that's why I completed my high-school education with a pedagogical specialisation. I also remember that while I was dancing in the amateur dance group "Nowa Huta," prof. Anatol Kocyłowski, the group's leader, often asked me to assist him in leading the classes. I think it was prof. Kocyłowski triggered my interest in teaching. I began giving dance classes in different cultural centres at a very early stage of my dance career, which helped me positively verify my qualifications and my passion for teaching.

In the course of my career transition process, I set a precise date of my last dance recital. I decided that after that recital I'd devote myself entirely to dance education by working at the Silesian Centre of Regional Education in Koszęcin. At that moment I have already gained vast practical and theoretical qualifications that were essential to develop myself in a new place.

I currently work as a choreographer and dance teacher, specialising in Polish national dances. I am also an expert on Upper Silesia. I work both with young children and adults, students active in dance groups affiliated with different universities and post-graduate schools; people of all walks of life from all over the world (Brazil, UK, Japan), including teachers who want to encourage their pupils to learn Polish national dances. Recently, the Polish Artistic Song and Dance Ensemble "Wilia" from Vilnius asked me to create a Polish national dances' choreography.

The most challenging part of the transition process was to combine studying with dancing. The intensity of working as a professional dancer, with all the tournées, made it very hard for me to combine

the two. I received a lot of support from the Executive Director of my dance company – he helped us a lot with the logistics and finding different solutions that would facilitate our studies. I also value the support I received within the Career Transition Programme for Dancers, especially the meetings with the career counsellors and their advice that streamlined my transition process. I believe that both this support and the support of my former employer were crucial.

The career transition process made me realize that I can do various interesting things. In my opinion, when you decide to terminate your stage career, the most difficult moment comes once you realize that a mere second later the lights will fade out and the audience's applause will stop, and this applause and being in the limelight were the most precious rewards for your effort and artistry.

I know from my own experience that making a change in your life is not easy, but I also know empirically that it is always good to think about doing something else than the things you are used to. My advice to the dancers who are at the beginning of their stage careers is: keep learning about yourselves and following the job market from the onset of your career; nurture your contacts with institutions that support dancers, so that you know who can give you a helping hand and provide you with good advice in due time.





## Monika Urbaniak

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**Monika Urbaniak is a psychologist, psychotherapist and a graduate of several institutions including the SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Wrocław, Psychodynamic Centre in Cracow, Higher School of Marketing Management and Foreign Languages in Katowice, and Humanitas University. She is also a graduate of the State Ballet School in Bytom. She worked at the Bytom Opera, the Musical Theatre in Chorzów and the Musical Theatre in Wrocław. One of her fondest stage memories is participating in the first dance show *Opentaniec* at the Musical Theatre in Gdynia.**

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A serious injury at the peak of my form was a defining moment for me, as it was then that I first felt the real risk of having to change my profession. The very thought that my professional career could suddenly come to an end, and not because of my age, but because of something that was beyond my control, was terrifying. I returned to the stage after a several months' break, but the fear remained. I realised it was time to consider an alternative career path. I decided to pursue my dream of running my own dance school, because it was unrealistic for me to choose a path that had nothing to do

with dance. Being the director of a dance school allowed me to live out my passion and combine it with the knowledge I gained from my business degree.

After graduating from the ballet school, I accepted a job offer from the Silesian Opera, but the work schedule (mornings and evenings) made it impossible for me to study the subject that interested me the most, i.e. psychology. I listened to the voice of reason offered by my grandfather, who in his life combined his passion for art with that for science, and decided to study economics in the extramural mode.

The most important moment for me to change the direction of my life was when I started a family and gave birth to my son. Motherhood added a new dimension to my life. Not only did my body change, but my priorities, my values and my idea of life changed. With the knowledge I had gained at university, I started working as a Marketing and Advertising Executive Director. After a few years on that post, I realised that reproducing corporate patterns of life and career building was far from what I needed.

As I contemplated a career change, I recalled my interests from my youth. I decided to do what I could not do before when I was a professional dancer. At the age of thirty, when my awareness was different than before, I decided to start a new chapter. I began to study psychology. This field had always interested me, so I quickly absorbed the knowledge transmitted by the university teachers. Before I went to the first lecture, I had imagined that I would be the oldest student in the class. It turned out, however, that students over thirty years of age formed quite a large group. Just like me, they had varying degrees of knowledge, work and life experience, and commitment.

I believe that one should not be afraid of new challenges. Thinking that it's too late to change only keeps you from seeking a new path. It's sad to think that change is irreversible. I feel deep inside that the desire for theatre is still there, at the same time I am aware that it's important to draw a line and acknowledge the separation with the stage. My body will forever remember the theatre stage and the fond memories related to performing. You have to get used to it, say goodbye to one thing and welcome the other. Controlling the fear one has when facing something new and unknown is like controlling stage fright. Every dancer can learn to use this skill offstage. Adaptability, the determination to push boundaries, is ingrained in ballet school curriculum, which provides a dancer with

energy to overcome challenges, to persevere. Ballet school also gives one a sense of empowerment that stems from the confidence that hard work always bears fruit. I constantly draw from my stage experience and my work in the ballet studio. I never get discouraged by difficulties I encounter on the way to achieving my dreams.

It seems to me that dancers who are about to start a new career path can rest easy, because due to deepening our body awareness we are in good contact with ourselves. Additionally, as dancers we also have such “bonus” resources as creativity and openness to new ideas, consistency and motivation to work, which we have developed since we were 10 years old. When we are thinking about career transition, it’s also worth remembering what interested us before dance took over our lives. It’s also important to remember that we cannot control everything, that not everything is in our hands, and that “the only constant in life is change.” This change can be unexpected or unwanted. Nevertheless, we can always sculpt our personal response to what happens. Whenever change happens, it is good to have support from the outside. In my case, I find it easier to pursue my dreams with the support of my friends and family.

At first, I was really scared of the whole career transition programme’s application process – all the paperwork associated with the process of applying for the scholarship from the NIMiT programme. But I decided to go for it and, importantly, I was not alone in this process. I could always count on the professional support and advice from the institute’s staff. I felt encouraged, supported, and taken care of by the entire team of the Institute.

Now that I have completed my studies thanks to the Institute’s scholarship, I see that fulfilling a dream has opened up new opportunities for me. I live by the sea, something I have always dreamed of. I have opened my own psychological practice. I am still thinking about other potential directions in which I could develop my skills and competencies. I love my current career as much as I love dancing. Working as a psychotherapist is undoubtedly intellectually demanding, at the same time, it truly fascinates me to discover the psychological structures that determine human behaviour. It gives me professional satisfaction and is a source of passion.



## Katarzyna Wieliczko-Pos

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**Katarzyna Wieliczko-Pos is a physiotherapist. After graduating from the Ballet School in Bytom, she began her dancing career in the Silesian Opera, with which she worked for 25 years. She took part in almost all ballet, opera and operetta premieres as well as in the Opera's tours in Germany, Holland, Spain and other countries.**

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After 10 years of working in the theatre, I realized that I should look for an alternative career path, other than dancing. For a long time I had been interested in medicine, but I was aware that combining full-time studies at the medical university with the professional work of a dancer would be virtually impossible. Another seven years passed before I decided to start first-degree extramural studies at the department of physiotherapy. I defended my BA thesis and I locked the diploma in the sock drawer... Unfortunately, I was still unable to integrate work in both professions simultaneously. It was a bit disappointing, but I was fully aware that as a professional dancer I would not be able to make practical use of the knowledge I had gained at the physiotherapy studies.

I re-visited the idea of taking up a new profession during a meeting with the Institute of Music and Dance about the career transition programme. On the same day, I made an appointment with the Transition Programme's counsellor. I had a certain idea and I found

out that the Career Transition Programme's scholarship would allow me to finance it!

It made me very happy. I thought this was just the right programme for me! I remembered that a few years earlier I had submitted my papers for MA studies and then I withdrew them because the course was too expensive for me. Had it not been for the Career Transition Programme and the financial aid it provided, I would not have been able to afford such a momentuous change in my life.

I submitted the application for the Career Transition Programme and received the funding – that was the moment when I made up my mind and I submitted the notice of termination of the work contract to the Opera House office. Yeah..., I have spent 25 years working as a professional dancer and submitted this notice on my terms... I consciously did not want to combine work and studying because I knew how difficult it would be.

Fortunately, the career transition process was simpler than I thought. Within two weeks of my notice, life increased in intensity. I didn't have time for recollections and instead of delving in the past, I was taking in what the upcoming events were carrying with them. These changes were an outcome of my decisions and I felt that I had an impact on what was happening. The career transition was easier for me because I started working in a massage parlour, which was already operating in the Opera House. It was also easier for me because I remained in the same environment, with the same people around me.

I worked in a different capacity, played a different role, but I was still working in the theatre. Of course, things would get difficult at times. I remember that during the first two months of my MA studies I was reading texts without really understanding and assimilating them. I had to re-learn how to study ;).

Today I am at the beginning of my new professional career. I try to be patient and humble, and make use of the knowledge and experience of others. They are frequently much younger than me but have more knowledge and experience.

Now, in retrospect, I think that if dance is one's whole life, it is much harder to give it up and find an alternative career path. Besides dancing, I have always had a second dream at the back of my head that I wanted to pursue. And that was the right time for me

to go for it. I was certain that at some point I would have to stop dancing and leave the stage. It became even clearer to me when I realized that I was dancing with dancers who were as young as my own children.

My advice for dancers is to have a passion and make your dreams come true. If one door closes on you, you have to open another one. The world outside dance is beautiful, interesting and worth exploring. You must have faith that you will succeed and trust that you will find a job. You must look for strength within yourself and for additional support in your surroundings. In my case, the support came from my family, because they knew my plans.

I also believe that my career transition project was well-prepared and well-structured. However, if I were to write an application without the help of the Programme's career counsellor, I do not know if I would have undertaken it. I am happy that I had professional counsellor's support and a stimulus that encouraged me to make my plans more concrete and to make a decision. I was concerned about drafting the budget and financial settlements, but I got a whole lot of patience and support. I owe a deep bow to the Institute and the people who took their time to help me through the whole process.

The world looks different now for young dancers, they are more open to change, they study and pursue their interests. They know that it is difficult to work in this profession until retirement and that there comes a moment when a transition has to be made. This is what awaits us all.







## Aneta Wojtyra

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**A pre-school teacher, dance instructor, choreographer and a dancer, Aneta Wojtyra graduated from the Ballet School in Bytom. She danced as a soloist in the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble, with which she has been associated for 26 years, performing its entire repertoire. She is especially fond of the ensemble’s tour of Spain.**

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I work as a dance instructor and choreographer in municipal Culture Centres. I also hold the post of a pedagogue at the Non-public Ballet School and Ballet Club in Częstochowa. Recently, I received a proposal of becoming an assistant of the Ballet Manager. I’m still in the midst of my career transition. And a lot is going on. I have tons of ideas and a number of new opportunities have recently emerged.

I only started thinking about career transition when the Career Transition Programme was launched by the National Institute of Music and Dance. Before that, the thought hadn’t crossed my mind. I was certain that career transition did not concern me. When I first met with a career counsellor, I realised that it was high time for me

to think seriously about my professional future and acknowledge it's a great thing that you can educate yourself continuously. I wanted to make the most of the opportunities offered by the Programme.

I have been wondering for a long time what I want to do next and how to invest my energy, time and the Programme's financial support, to make the best of the transition. I thought about university studies but also about short-term courses. One thing was certain for me – I did not want to continue my education in dance pedagogy, because that would give me rather narrow professional opportunities, basically limited to ballet schools. I also did not want to go into something completely new, I was aware of my age. I have always liked working with children, sharing knowledge, doing creative things. So I decided to study pre-school pedagogy, which resonates with me and allows me to cooperate with many institutions.

I remember, that when I entered the Career Transition Programme and began my studies, I realised that I landed in a completely different environment, and I thought to myself – “What on earth am I doing here?” Now I feel great about my new studies. I study with 35 other people of different age. Some of them are very young – newly minted high school graduates, others are at my age. My academic performance is very good – last semester, I passed all of the exams with highest grade point average among all of the students from my year.

My husband played a very important role in the whole transition process – he took care of the house while I was working or studying. I also received great support from my sons, who helped with all IT issues. My university colleagues also proved very helpful – we shared books and notes from the classes. I also felt that my boss understands and supports my transition and my drive for education and for upgrading my qualifications.

Life changes don't scare me. I see them as something natural and fluid, and perhaps that's why I have approached the change in my professional life so calmly. I'm happy that I allowed myself to take the time for the transition process. I see it as an important gift to myself that influences my overall development. I read a lot, my memory has improved, I notice that my language has become richer and prettier. I have met a lot of people from different, new backgrounds. This whole process of transition also brought about good things for my relatives and triggered a new wave of development in my family.

My advice to other dancers is, “Do not be afraid but give it a proper thought! Think about the things you like, not about what is possible, but about what exactly you want. Is it going to be something like that? Or is it something else? There are many possibilities, you just have to dare to make the first step.” I also think it is important to be able to receive help from other people, to accept the support provided by the Career Transition Programme for Dancers organised by the National Institute of Music and Dance. I would strongly urge dancers to take advantage of these opportunities and enjoy developing new skills and competences. Change is a natural thing and that is how it should be approached. All you have to do is be well-prepared when it nears, and open yourself to the world and people. When a person opens up, all things quickly fall into place.

My advice to dancers who are at the beginning of their stage careers would be, “From the onset of your dance career, make sure that you find ways of gaining additional professional experience, not only ways of educating yourself, but also gaining experience outside dance – this combination of experience and education is important. The stage career passes quickly and you do not immediately start learning and gaining additional experience outside dancing, it will be more difficult for you after some time to change your path.”

Personally, I think that the support offered by the Ministry in the form of the Career Transition Programme is fantastic. This is money well spent, and I think it is a step in the right direction, which will help other dancers improve their skills and retrain for another profession. I am glad that such a program was created, and that at some point I was able to talk to a career counselor, receive advice, and count on the help of the people working with me in the programme and their flexible approach to the implementation of my project.

As of now, I am the director of the Non-Public Ballet School and Ballet Club in Częstochowa – School of the Art of Dance, as well as a lecturer at the WSB Academy, from which I graduated. The programme allowed me to raise not only my professional qualifications but also my social standing. I also managed to release an academic publication on a number of educational activities at my home institution, the Stanisław Hadyna Song and Dance Ensemble “Śląsk.” I am still working at the Ensemble, this being my 28th year, but since 2022 I have been involved with cultural heritage preservation and archiving.



# Paulina Wycichowska

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A choreographer, academic teacher, dance teacher, art therapist, Pilates Core trainer, author of *I Mind the Step* method of building body and movement awareness, Paulina Wycichowska is a graduate of the State Ballet School in Poznań and the London Contemporary Dance School, as well as a former soloist of the Polish Dance Theatre, where she danced for seventeen years. Currently, she is interested in a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to the human being, teaching and learning processes, as well as creating and disseminating art. In her versatile activities, she popularising her belief in the transformative power of dance as a field of art, science, therapy and communication.

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At present, having completed my career transition process, I teach dance theory, modern dance technique, composition, improvisation and contemporary dance at the Faculty of Dance in Physical Culture of the Eugeniusz Piasecki University of Physical Education in Poznań and at the Karol Marcinkowski Medical University in Poznań. As a guest teacher, I also give workshops on introduction to choreotherapy at the Department of Somatics in Dance and Therapy at the Grażyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz University of Music in Łódź and at the Karol Marcinkowski Medical University in Poznań. As regards my artistic activity, I currently work as an independent artist. Being a freelancer is a rather difficult path and initially, not a very profitable one for a person who is over forty years old and

has so far been employed mainly within the institutional theatre structures. Occasionally, I am also involved in dance theatre projects in roles that combine movement and dance.

Thanks to the Career Transition Programme's stipend I graduated from art therapy and choreotherapy. Based on these courses I can presently share my knowledge and experience with others. I am also developing and expanding my own brand – *I Mind the Step* – and I run workshops of art therapy with a particular focus on movement and dance. Aside from these, I work as a mindfulness and creativity coach and give classes within the framework of personal development workshops. There are great perspectives for somatics in dance, also in terms of the growing popularity of dance and its broad popularisation. Dance can function as a therapeutic tool that can help to express and liberate emotions, control stress and prevent the effects of such neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's or Parkinson's Disease. My career-building process is ongoing. Currently, I am financing my new courses myself.

At the moment, I feel that I can take advantage not only of my experience but also the potential liberated through gaining new competencies and skills. The most difficult part for me so far has been bidding farewell to the stage and the everyday life's routine of a dancer. You dedicate yourself completely to dance, believing that dancing is your whole life, and there is nothing else besides it. When you leave the stage, you have to work very hard with your own mind. First of all, you have to accept that you can function in a different role, and this is followed by another revelation: that you are capable of opening yourself up to new things.

A change of perspective comes in handy on your new path. I remember to this day the moment when suddenly, during my art therapy courses, I saw dance and art from a different perspective. I had sensed this before, yet it was only during my training in a new domain that I realised that art can have a profoundly therapeutic effect on people. I discovered dance therapy. However, it was choreotherapy that proved to be the biggest challenge. As a dancer, I still had certain barriers in my mind, I still wanted to work out and train my body, blocking out the warning signals so I could push the limits of my physicality. Dancers tend to escape into a certain form of movement, where it becomes less and less authentic. This form can be a task or a game, and dancers selectively ignore certain warning signals from the body to accomplish this form. To work with dance in a therapeutic context I had to get rid of old habits.

I consider the career transition process as an incredible development of my own self-awareness. I am now looking at the world through different eyes – the transition process opened not only the doors but all the windows too. I met a huge number of inspiring people and created a network of contacts in my new profession.

The longing to dance in the old manner lingers, although entering the new field, going through all of the courses and meeting people from outside the dance community fills me with enthusiasm and constantly inspires me to explore. I see the transition process as an achievement and I am happy that I was courageous enough to relish my new life. It is very important not to approach the transition with fear and the assumption that the new life will surely be worse. Having a variety of acquaintances and people around you is of great importance, so it is worth keeping in touch with people also outside the theatrical and dance circle. This will give you a broader perspective. These contacts have been assuring me that life outside dance is possible and worthy of trying. I do believe that in the heyday of a dance career one should keep the ability to develop and engage in passions other than dance, explore new places, activities and people – even if your packed calendar only allows you to keep your eyes open. This enriches us as people, fuels our dance, and leaves the door to another world ajar. One day we may choose to explore this other world when we decide to make the transition.





## Łukasz Zasik

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Łukasz Zasik is a riding instructor and owner of a stud farm, as well as a dance teacher. Having completed his ballet education, he began his stage career in Poznań as a soloist in the Musical Theatre and the Stanisław Moniuszko Grand Theatre in Poznań. In the subsequent years, he had further successes at the Grand Theatre National Opera in Warsaw and the National Ballet of Mexico. After returning to Poland, he joined the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble and the Entertainment Theatre in Chorzów, where he appeared in the cult show *Billy Elliot*, among others.

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The end of my career was not a surprise for me. Every professional dancer knows full well that the age of 40 usually means the end of work on stage. The body has its own laws. I have been thinking about this moment since I started my professional work in the theatre. What will I do after ballet? I have been searching for the answer for a long time. On my way to the point I am at now, I unfortunately started studying law, which I fortunately finished at the Academy of Physical Education in Poznań, and a lot of instructor courses. I decided to develop my skills.

One of my ideas for a new start was to create ballet centres in Żarki and Częstochowa. My innate tenacity and the support of my family came in handy. I always enjoyed working with children and young people and my enthusiasm brought good results – the groups started to grow. Everything was going in the right direction, the children were working hard, beautiful performances were emerging and... Covid broke out...

The closure of my centres overnight was a big blow from which I had to recover quickly. Because of the pandemic, my project realised within the Career Transition Programme at the National Institute of Music and Dance also slowed down considerably. It was exactly planned for 3 years and unfortunately the whole training dragged on. I lost a year, but life has shown me that nothing happens by accident.

Looking back, paradoxically, I cannot see those months as lost. Ballet gives everyone a lot of stamina – I decided to build a stable just at that difficult time. I did it with my own hands. My savings helped me buy my first horses, scholarship money helped me qualify, and the knowledge I acquired while training gave me competence, peace of mind, and confidence. My dreams became reality – I have my own stable!

Loving horses and working with them is not a recipe for an easy, comfortable, and lazy life. Running a stable means working 7 days a week, with no holidays or weekends off. I have also experienced first-hand how wrong the popular opinion about “having the constitution of a horse” is. A horse, just like a human, can have a better or worse day. They are very sensitive and delicate animals that need a lot of attention and care. However, I get enormous satisfaction from my contact with them and working with them has allowed me to provide for my family.

I never thought that ballet and horses had so much in common. My knowledge of the body, motor coordination, body awareness and fitness comes in handy. Without these skills and experiences, I probably would not have been able to master horsemanship as quickly. I also draw upon my experience and knowledge gained from instructors I have met along the dance path of life. I am able to teach horsemanship effectively.

There is more common ground between the passions of my life because the horse and the rider are partners. A dancer communicates emotions with their body language and a horse communicates

with us in the same way. It is very important to be able to read a horse's behaviour. I have often heard from "horse people" that I understand these animals well. I am sure it's because of my previous work experience.

I have always loved horses, but as a dancer I did not have the opportunity to realise my dream of working with them. Horsemanship is a very injury prone sport, at least as much as dancing, and my career was rich and evolving. I developed it with persistence, perseverance and tireless work. I was aware that success comes step by step, along with patience and resilience to failure.

The pandemic is not gone, but my fear of it is gone. Thanks to the programme, I am a qualified riding instructor, I run a riding school and the activities of the extinct ballet centres are slowly being revived.

My story shows that it is worth striving for success and celebrating it at every moment, because the time and admiration on stage pass quickly. Therefore, think about the future, take an interest in the world around you, identify opportunities and learn about new things that surround you with curiosity. Develop your interests.

My professional activity has always been born from my passion – first dancing was my hobby, then it became my profession and gave me satisfaction. A fascination with horses became a hobby, and a hobby became a profession. Everyone should have a springboard, an area outside of work that motivates us, enriches us, and brings us joy.

I wish everyone who reads this text a lot of curiosity, openness to what the world gives us and the courage to take the risk of change. The solutions are often obvious – I remember clearly that sunny day and the friendly atmosphere at a meeting with a career advisor. If it had not been for that meeting, I probably would not have found as much energy for change.

Time has shown that I made good decisions at the optimal time. Everything happened at the right time in my life, and I can realize my childhood dreams.

## Aleksandra Żaczkova

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**Aleksandra Żaczkova is a flamenco instructor, theorist, methodologist and lecturer of Polish folk dance, choreotherapist, choreographer and dance pedagogue. As a dancer, she worked as a soloist and ballet manager assistant in the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble, where she danced for 27 years, performing the company’s entire repertoire, including her favourite one: the scarf dance. Among her fondest memories is the ensemble’s tour of Japan.**

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I currently work as an Education Specialist at the Silesian Centre of Regional Education. I organise workshops for children, teenagers and adults. Also, as the Coordinator of the Summer Artistic School, I organise workshops for different artistic groups. I also work as a pedagogue in a ballet club, and as a choreographer and choreotherapist. As a dance instructor, I teach different forms of dance for different groups: children at the ballet club, organised groups of pupils and seniors. I specialise in flamenco, among others. Since 2018, I have also been teaching classes of Polish folk dance at the Dance Theatre Department in Bytom – faculty of the AST National Academy of Theatre Arts in Cracow.





For a long time, I was only interested in dancing, although somewhere at the back of my head, I was aware that one day I would have to think about a professional change. I started thinking about career transition more intently only after I found out that the early retirement pensions were abolished. But my optimised career transition began with my conversation with a career counsellor. After this meeting, I started to make more specific plans for my future career. I simply dared to make a step in the direction of fulfilling the dreams connected with my fascination with flamenco. I decided to become a specialised flamenco instructor. I remember that even as a child I was strongly drawn to flamenco and I sometimes watched it on TV. But at that time, there was no possibility of learning flamenco in Poland. It didn't even cross my mind that flamenco could become an important part of my professional life.

The hardest part of the transition process was actually taking the first step. At first, I was afraid that my plan would fail because it was unrealistic. But I quickly realised that the best aspects of the career transition process, namely – I was getting to know my own abilities and by doing so, I was overcoming my own limitations and understanding that I could always learn something new in my life.

If I were to name the people who helped me in the transition process, I would certainly start with the career counsellor. She gave me the courage to go on and inspired me to look for the choices that resonated with me. I remember when she asked me, “Is there anything that you liked doing in the past?” And then she helped me see that my childhood dreams could become reality. My family was also great support for me – all of my relatives got together to create logistic and emotional conditions for my pursuits. The backing of the Career Transition Programme's Team was also crucial for me. They supported me and were genuinely celebrating my achievements with me.

My final dance performance can serve as the symbol of my professional change. I felt like a very fulfilled dancer, soloist, teacher. I have achieved exactly what I wanted to achieve as a dancer. I performed solo parts and educated my successors. And this is extremely important for me. When I left the stage, I regretted nothing. I felt with all my heart that now I could do something new.

The career transition has changed me. I think I got to know myself better – I feel that now I have a greater purpose of what is good for me and I have much more courage to defend my point of view in

conversations with others. I am also less worried about the things that remain outside my influence. I am more daring and can get more things done.

I think that for a dancer the career transition can be difficult if one does not have broad horizons and also if one is narrowly focused on a specific kind of dance only.

Therefore, if I were to share my advice with other dancers, I would say: “Be open to the world and other people. Do not be afraid to search for new professional possibilities and to peek into your earlier professional ideas. Broaden your horizons and recall the things you liked doing in the past. Ask other people’s advice, watch films and tutorials to get inspired as to different things that you do in your life.”

My advice to dancers, who are at the beginning of their dance career is: “Enjoy dancing and always do it with passion. But at the same time, be aware that dance is like a butterfly – it is a fleeting profession. Do not forget to keep your feet firmly planted on the ground and think about the future, and make sure that your choices resonate with you.”







## Emanuela Żukowska

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**A practicing psychologist and psychotherapist (psychodynamic orientation), Emanuela Żukowska is also a choreographer at the Wyspiański Theatre in Katowice (since 2016) and a former professional dancer. She graduated from the State Ballet School in Bytom. Her dancing career began in the “Śląsk” Song and Dance Ensemble before she spent the next eighteen years dancing as a soloist at the Rozrywki Theatre in Chorzów.**

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I was lucky that after I gave up dancing, I could still stay in the theatre community. I started working at the Silesian Theatre in Katowice as a manager. It's been like this for 6 years now and this job follows from my education. However, when I gave up dancing, I asked myself what would give me as much pleasure as dancing. When I decided to be a professional dancer, I knew it would be a fleeting pursuit. I was fully committed to dance and found professional satisfaction on stage for over ten years. I wanted to replicate that experience on a new career path. I already have a degree in business management, which is useful for my business work in theatre, but it was not a decision of my heart. After graduating from high school, it seemed like a very pragmatic decision since this was a time of political and economic change in Poland. Economics seemed to be the most sensible course to study, and economists were also in high demand on the market. I thought

economics would guarantee me a job in the future, although at that time my life was entirely dedicated to theatre and dancing, and I was a mother at the same time.

Later, when I was no longer performing and my daughter had grown enough for me to take weekends off, I found time to pursue my great passion – psychology. I decided to enroll in psychological studies with the support of the Career Transition Programme. At the beginning of my dance career, neither my professional nor family situation allowed me to pursue a degree in psychology. Also, at the time, there was no opportunity to study on the weekends or on an individual basis.

Now, after graduating in psychology, not only do I still work in theatre, where my knowledge of psychological mechanisms helps me a lot with my clients, but I also serve as a psychotherapist at the Psychological Health Centre “Feniks” in Katowice. As of now, I am more aware of the role of communication, emotions, and relationships in dealing with clients. I have also learned to perceive people holistically.

However, before I learned about the psychological mechanisms that govern our lives, I found that studying psychology was much more difficult than I expected. Statistics and methodology were a huge challenge! Not only for me, but also for most of the students. Studying also showed me the importance of being attentive, open-minded, and accepting of others. I also did not expect, and this was a very positive surprise, that this course would bring together sensitive, emotional, and empathetic people. We developed friendships and lasting relationships. It was a taste of the professional environment I was entering as a psychologist. Just as the theatre company was my second family, I am now pleasantly surprised to be amidst another professional psychological family. Despite my initial fear of clashing with another non-theatrical environment and stepping out of my professional comfort zone, my environment has turned out to be made up of highly sensitive people. This is the common denominator for both professional fields that I work in, dance and psychology.

I am glad I decided to follow my passion. It was a great move and I improved my self-confidence and cognitive skills. It was a considerable challenge, but now it is very useful for my further professional development. Although I have already graduated, done my master's degree, completed my internship and trained in an outpatient psychiatric clinic, I am still expanding my knowledge in psychology with the therapeutic psychodynamic approach, and keep developing myself as

an individual. This gives me great pleasure and satisfaction. Psychology is fascinating!

In the future, I would like to devote all my time to working with clients who need psychological support. Now, in addition to my work at the Centre for Mental Health, I work as an executive director and in a club for artistic gymnastics. I use my psychological knowledge in all these environments. It gives me great satisfaction when I teach the basics of ballet to young athletes on the Silesian national team. I can also teach them techniques for coping with stress and failure, which, in addition to success, are part of the athlete's profession and help them develop their personality harmoniously.

In retrospect, I can see how far I have come in building my new professional life. I have put in a lot of effort, a lot of time, but it would not have been possible without the financial support of the Institute. Alongside my studies, I was also able to start my training at the Psychodynamic Centre in Cracow.

I think I had been prepared for career transition for a long time. I had imagined my future life outside the stage, even though I knew it was difficult, given that a 20-year-old or believes and feels that their body is indestructible, and to imagine oneself away from the stage twenty years from now may seem impossible. However, it is important to remember that retraining is part of being a dancer. Having the courage to think about the future is essential to being alert to what is to come. It is worth paying attention to what makes us happy, what catches our attention, what is near to our heart. It is necessary to prepare for this transition, to familiarize ourselves with it, to consciously find our place therein. There are many years ahead of us after we leave the stage, which can be as satisfying as the dance life on stage.

## About the Programme

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**The Career Transition Programme for Dancers (Program Przekwalifikowania Zawodowego Tancerzy) was started by the National Institute of Music and Dance in 2015. The Programme is addressed to professional dancers, performers of artistic dance. All the counselling, training and informational activities are offered free of charge and with a guarantee of confidentiality, regardless of the previous experience in dancing or professional qualifications. While the Programme is implemented throughout Poland, foreign dancers are also welcome.**

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The Programme offers:

- expert guidance of a career counsellor (individual consultations), regardless of previous experience in dancing or professional qualifications,
- free access to job market workshops that will teach you how to find a job you are looking for (application documents, CV, preparing for an interview) and to workshops boosting interpersonal competences,
- assistance with drawing up an individual action plan,
- scholarships and grants to cover the costs of education, as well as complementing and acquiring new qualifications.

As part of the Programme, participants are guaranteed support from a team of experts composed of career counsellors and Programme coordinators, who help plan and make decisions pertaining to a new professional career.

The scholarship may be obtained, upon application, by the dancers who are planning to end their stage careers and who have a dozen years' professional experience or three years' dancing experience ended due to an injury.

The maximum amount of the scholarship is forty thousand Polish zlotys. It may be obtained for a maximum of forty-four months. The scholarship can be used to fund studies, courses or workshops preparing for the new job. Additionally, it may cover the costs of travels and accommodation, health insurance and, in exceptional cases, the living costs incurred during the realisation of the project.

As a condition to obtain the scholarship, the applicant must present a declaration of ending his or her stage career as a dancer within a maximum of twelve months of the date of completing the individual plan of career transition covered by the scholarship.

In addition to the Transition Programme, a pilot Professional Dancers' Development of Non-Dancing Competences Programme (Program Rozwoju Pozatanecznych Kompetencji Zawodowych Tancerzy) was announced in the autumn of 2022. The Programme responds to the needs of the dancing community having been prepared by a team of experts and career counsellors from the National Institute of Music and Dance.

The Programme is addressed to the dancers who, during their dancing career or no later than a year after its completion, plan to develop their professional competences and become acquainted with the job market beyond the dance industry. This might be an introduction to their subsequent career transition. The Programme will give them an opportunity to take part in training courses that will help them verify their plans or obtain new skill sets.

The grant of up to five thousand Polish zlotys can be obtained by the dancer no more than three times during his or her dancing career. When applying for the grant, one must document a dance performance record of at least five years and to have attended at least one meeting with a career counsellor. Obtaining the grant does not preclude the applicant from taking part in the Career Transition Programme for Dancers in the future.

To learn more about the Programme, visit [nimit.pl](http://nimit.pl)

# NIMiT

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The National Institute of Music and Dance has been a member of the International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers (IOTPD) since 2016. The organisation's mission is to support dancers at the onset of their new professional career. The IOTPD members come from nine different countries. These are organisation which create systemic solutions for the transition of professional dancers. The National Institute of Music and Dance has already exchanged experiences and good practices with its partners from Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, the Netherlands, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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## The Career Transition Programme for Dancers in numbers:

- 104** scholarships awarded for individual career transition plans (60 women and 44 men)
- 60** completed individual career transition plans
- 296** individual consultations between dancers and career counsellors
- 30** briefings with teams in 14 cities throughout Poland
- 25** completed workshops addressed to dancers
- 191** workshop participants
- 13** completed webinars „Zbuduj swoją karierę” („Build Your Career”)
- 102** participants of the webinars „Zbuduj swoją karierę” („Build Your Career”)
- 178** participants of psychology webinars – students of ballet schools
- 12** grants awarded in the Professional Dancers' Development of Non-Dancing Competences Programme

# About the team

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## Monika Kaszewska



### **coordinator of the Career Transition Programme for Dancers**

Dancer with twenty years' stage experience, teacher, choreographer. Graduate of the Roman Turczynowicz Comprehensive Ballet School in Warsaw and the Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw (diploma in ballet pedagogy).

She obtained the title of cultural manager from the Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw.

She has worked for the National Institute of Music and Dance since 2015. She is in charge of enquiries, addressing doubts expressed by some dancers, and coordinating meetings between dancers and career counsellors.

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## Anna Čemeljić

### **coordinator of scholarship applications**

Cultural anthropologist by profession, she dances traditional dances in her free time. For many years, she has been responsible for coordinating and accounting for the projects. She assists with preparation of application forms for the scholarship programme, particularly in relation to its financial part.





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## Ewa Salwa

### **coordinator of the Professional Dancers' Development of Non-Dancing Competences Programme**

Dancer and teacher. Graduate of the Feliks Parnell Ballet School in Łódź and the Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw (diploma in ballet pedagogy). She also completed postgraduate studies of physioprophy-laxis and correction at the Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw.



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## Dobrosława Choryńska-Chudy

### **career counsellor**

Career counsellor and instructor specialising in career activation and job market. She assists the candidates applying for the Programme with planning of the professional development, career reorientation and the choice of educational path. She advises and analyses the candidates' aptitude and professional potential in conducting their own business operations. Licensed instructor of the international programme Spadochron (Parachute) for those planning their careers, changing jobs and seeking jobs. She has more than ten years' experience of a personal adviser in HR specialising in such areas as development paths and recruitment, and she is as an assessor for the Assessment and Development Centre projects.

In her free time, she is a passionate ballroom and Argentine tango dancer.



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## Ewa Warchoł

### career counsellor

Career counsellor, coach, psychotraumatologist, instructor. Certified consultant of diagnostic tools (MBTI, Insight/DISC, Kompas Kariery), licensed instructor of the international programme Spadochron (Parachute) which prepares candidates to land or change jobs. For many years, she taught career counselling at tertiary institutions in Gdańsk and Warsaw. She possesses practical and theoretical knowledge of the mechanisms governing the job market, also on the basis of her almost twenty-five years' experience of working in various industries as an expert at staff development and as a recruiter. She is in charge of complex outplacement programmes in collaboration with the international industry leaders. Since 2008, she has specialised with working with people in transition, including those who make educational and career choices. She also works as a psychotherapist. In her free time, she is passionate about music and historical dance. For seventeen years, she danced in amateur historical dance ensembles: Pawanilia in Poland and Pastime in England. She is now pursuing her passion at the Klub Tańca Dawnego (Historical Dance Club) 'Alta Novella'. She has taken part in dance master classes with such instructors as Barbara Sparti, Lieven Baert, Bruna Gondoni, Dorothée Wortelboer and Jane Gingell.



# List of jobs selected for the scholarship programme

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- **Massage therapist/technician**
- **Sport/recreation and relaxation masseur/masseuse**
- **Physiotherapist**
- **Medical instructor and rehabilitator**
- **Movement therapist / medical instructor**
- **Orthopaedic physiotherapist**
- **Paediatric physiotherapist**
- **NNDT Bobath therapist**
- **Sensory integration therapist/physiotherapist**
- **Spine therapist**
- **PNF therapist**
- **Sports instructor – personal trainer**
- **STOTT Pilates instructor**

- **Stretching and Pilates instructor**
  - **Instructor of corrective/compensation exercises and yoga specialising in working with children and senior citizens**
  - **Fitness instructor (additional specialisation: activation of senior citizens)**
  - **Organiser of free-time activities**
  - **Fitness instructor – diet and supplementation**
  - **Yoga instructor / Instructor of integral yoga, mindfulness and breathing techniques**
  - **Instructor of Nordic walking and corrective exercises**
  - **Fitness instructor (Pilates, functional training, yoga, stretching)**
  - **Dietician / psychodietician**
  - **Personal trainer, specialist in sports nutrition**
  - **Specialist in reflexology, biodynamic massage and nature therapy**
- 

- **Riding instructor / Stables master**
- 

- **Art therapist**
- **Dance therapist / Dance and movement psychotherapist**
- **Intimacy director and manager of women’s educational/informational platform dedicated to intimacy**

- Psychologist
  - Psychotherapist
  - Psychotherapist in bioenergy analysis
  - Nature therapist / energy healer / dance and movement therapist
  - Reflexologist
- 

- Choreographer
- 

- Dance teacher
  - Ballet teacher
  - Dance instructor
  - Zumba instructor with foreign languages
  - Dance instructor in bilingual nursery schools
  - Teacher of classical dance, folk dances and national dances
  - Dance teacher specialising in flamenco and dance therapy
  - Eurhythmics instructor working with children and adolescents
  - Instructor in educational and movement classes
- 

- Nursery teacher/assistant
- Teacher specialising in early school pedagogy
- Teacher of early childhood development

- **Special education teacher – oligophrenopedagogy  
and sensory integration therapist**
- 

- **Culture and folklore teacher**
  - **Polish culture teacher lecturing in English**
  - **Expert on art history and museology**
  - **Historian (teaching and research)**
- 

- **Actor / stage actor**
  - **Television journalist**
- 

- **Audio-video operator**
  - **Sound engineer**
  - **Acoustical engineer**
- 

- **Photographer / video producer**
  - **Photographer with English**
  - **Film editor**
- 

- **Set designer**
  - **Tailor designing and producing stage costumes,  
especially for ballet productions**
  - **Clothing brand designer**
-

- Occupational Health and Safety and fire safety expert, business trainer specialising in Occupational Health and Safety and related procedures
  - Specialist in public administration (serving the foreigners)
  - Specialist in the area of personal data protection and information protection
  - Personnel specialist
- 

- Professional driver
  - Professional driver (C, C+E, D, ADR)
  - Professional driver with categories from C to E and D for buses
  - Vehicle driver C+E+D authorised to carry hazardous materials and explosives
  - Driving instructor for categories A and B
- 

- Sales representative
  - Shop manager
  - Sales representative in pharmaceutical industry
  - Estate agent
- 

- Manager of cultural projects
- Manager of cultural institutions / Manager of cultural facilities

- **Art manager specialising in organising cultural activities and in production and organisation of events**
- 

- **Computer graphics and multimedia designer**
  - **Multimedia animation specialist**
  - **Communications specialist**
- 

- **Lawyer/graphologist, handwriting expert witness**
- 

- **Dental technologist**
- 

- **Cosmetologist**
  - **Hairdresser / hair stylist / barber**
  - **Make-up artist**
  - **Personal stylist**
- 

- **Professional pilot / airline/commercial pilot**
  - **Flight dispatcher**
  - **Drone pilot authorised to conduct thermovisual research, photogrammetry, creating 3D models, search and rescue**
  - **Hotelier/receptionist**
- 

- **IT programmer**
- **French-language IT consultant**
- **IT technician / full stack developer**



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- Ecological farmer
  - Gardener and landscapist

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- Carpenter specialising in furniture production
  - Interior designer

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- Fitter/installer and serviceman of PV installations/panels
  - Renewable energy specialist

- 
- OSINT analyst

- 
- Coach



## **Offstage: A Second Career**

Interviews conducted between 2017 and 2022  
by career counsellors Dobrosława Choryńska-Chudy  
and Ewa Warchoł

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Thirty-eight exciting and emotional conversations with the scholarship holders of the Professional Dancers' Transition Programme that has been run by the National Institute of Music and Dance since 2015. Thirty-eight stories of careers in dance, the circumstances that led to the decision of transition, the path to the professional shift and, eventually, the success these people have achieved in their newly-chosen professions.

All these conversations show that with the help of professional advisers, coordinators and psychologists, who provide support within the programme, the dancers find their own, alternative career paths. The conversations also prove that the former dancers can have fulfilling new careers.



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