

CSUF Dance Alumni Series:

Sarah Housepian

By: Kassandra Vasquez

Sarah Housepian graduated from the CSUF dance department in 2011. Since then she has been actively pursuing her career in dance. She said that being a part of a small knit community of dance was her greatest takeaway from the program. The professors also genuinely cared for the future of their students, which prepared her well for her future, according to Housepian.

In an interview with Housepian she answered the most pressing questions from current dance department students.

How long was the transition between graduating college and starting your professional career?

I started dancing for a local dance company professionally as I was finishing up my senior year of college at CSUF. After graduation, I auditioned all over the United States and participated in some workshops/intensives. After about 3 months, I got to be a part of another dance company in California. It wasn't until about a year after I graduated from CSUF that I made the plunge to move to NYC and further my career there.



How did you go about planning your living situation in a new location? How did you find a day job?

When moving to NYC, there is an artist platform where you can find temporary housing for a period of a time. I used that until I was able to find my own community and find future living situations. For a day job, I started out as a nanny for a family, which was flexible with scheduling when I needed to go to rehearsals or other auditions. I worked for a handful of families babysitting and eventually transitioned into meal prepping, finally becoming a personal chef to clients. This was a path I never knew I was going to go and could be even more flexible with my tour schedule, etc.

How did you establish yourself in your new community?

While establishing my new community in NYC, I took a bunch of different classes, went to a bunch of shows, and literally auditioned for everything under the sun. I needed to fully submerge myself in the community and arts scene, and ultimately find out what was the right path for me. The dance scene in NYC felt like an endless buffet of different companies and artists compared to everywhere else, so it was a lot to explore.

How did you discover your specific pathway in dance, or a related field?

I knew I wanted to be involved in film, teach, create, travel the world, perform, be able to learn from different artists and different repertoire and give back to the community, but it was impossible that one job was going to hold all that for me. Naturally, being a freelance dancer and being apart of multiple companies allowed me to do all those things. I kind of got to get a taste of all those things. It took a while of trial and error, and working with different individuals to see which were a good fit for me and my body.

What are some tips you have for network building?

I suggest dancers that are looking for a network be open to any dance opportunity you can get at first. Also, when your at auditions, workshops, etc., talk to people! Get to know other dancers and know who they also work for and who they are connected to. The majority of my jobs came not from auditions themselves, but simply just being present, open, and willing to work while at auditions, etc. When companies needed a quick dancer, for whatever reason, other dancers referred me for the job, which created a ripple effect to launch me into more and more opportunities. This was solely because I was a current and active face in the community that was at auditions, classes, workshops, etc.

What is the most surprising aspect of the professional dance world?

The most surprising aspect is seeing how resilient dancers are and how consistent they have to be in order for them to be successful. It really takes such a particular individual to thrive in this community. Those individuals are so inspirational and are like super human! You are rarely ever handed ANYTHING so it takes so much personal drive, motivation, and determination to keep going with this industry. It may not be for everyone and that's okay.

Other than dance, how did you prepare for a career in the profession?

I participated in many workshops for teaching laboratories as well as creative intensives/workshops. The majority of the companies require you not only to be an excellent dancer but an incredible choreographer and teacher. Prepping your mind and body to be flexible in those areas is important, as well as being culturally exposed to other dance forms with all the international travel that is required of me from one company I work for. Training to work with a language translator and learning how to teach dance in different countries is such a different adventure than in the US.

Do you have any advice on how to maintain physical health and stamina post graduation?

I advise students to figure out a routine that works for them to maintain physical health and stamina. Everyone's routine will look different. I also suggest to cross train. Be versatile with your physical health, not just dance, and try doing other things like pilates, running, yoga, etc. Also, never get bored in your routine. Dancers need to train for the rest of their lives whether they are professional or not, so figure out what works for you and what routine you need to sink your teeth into.

What advice do you have for current dance majors?

I would say that you can never dream too big; you need those high hopes and aspirations to keep fueling you. The process can be tough, but know that it is always preparing you for something on the other side. Do the work, tune your craft, and the road will be laid for you. It might be a clear road, but it's there.