



After nearly three decades as a professional dancer, Anthony Ferro left the stage to teach dance to college students. But when he came to Goddard to earn his own advanced degree, his studies led him back into the limelight again.

BY LAWRENCE
GOODMAN (MFAW '08)

Finding His Way Back to Center Stage

DANCER ANTHONY FERRO decided to get his master's degree for a very practical reason. He had taught at Marymount Manhattan College since 1998, but he could not become a tenured professor there unless he had an advanced degree.

"The most important thing to me was being on full-time faculty at Marymount," Anthony says. So he enrolled in Goddard's master's in interdisciplinary arts program in the fall of 2003.

Anthony had started his professional dancing career more than 30 years earlier, performing solo work for the companies of such famed dancers as Twyla Tharp, Louis Falco, Dennis Wayne and Kazuko Hirabayashi. He'd also been involved in productions by the Metropolitan Opera and the Atlanta Ballet, with a concert dance lineage spanning both classical and contemporary ballet and modern dance.

But when he took up teaching in the late '90s, he more or less gave up

performing himself.

"I let go of the young Tony Ferro performer part of me," says the 56-year-old Manhattanite. "I was Professor Ferro now and invested my energy in my students."

All this changed at Goddard. When he arrived, Anthony says he immediately took on and embraced the whole concept of interdisciplinary arts, studying film theory, poetry and painting.

"It was very rigorous and taxing work," he says of the many hours he put in reading difficult academic tomes, "but I found it very beneficial."

Then came the part where he had to shut the books and just dance.

The approach he chose involved improvisation.

"You have to walk onstage and have some concept of what you're doing and some framework," he says, "but still it's walking into a totally empty space. There's a lot of fear."

All the same, Anthony chose to keep going out into that "empty space" as he worked toward his degree. The inspiration he drew from his instructors made him feel much more confident to get back onstage. It wasn't so much learning new techniques or acquiring a new style, he says, as helping him to rediscover the dancer that had lain dormant inside him for all those years.

"I realized I had enough dance vocabulary embedded that I already knew what the dynamic range of my body was," he says. Goddard's program "helped me to acknowledge that I had all this inherently inside me." Over time, Anthony says his



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James Sutton, his husband and an associate arts professor of dance at New York University. The two improvised while having what Anthony calls “a conversation with piano music.” There were also simultaneous readings of poetry and prose selections.

In the abstract he wrote to describe “Moments,” Anthony says, “This manuscript presents the expansiveness of my thinking process. Spatial negotiations within my mind have arrived at a place of emptiness. I’ve arrived at a place where vast airways caress my bodily being, enabling me to trust the honest sensibilities that I deeply feel... By acquainting you with moments of my day,

theory, he has gone on to create a video of his own – a 20-minute piece called *Under/Friction* that was inspired by the work of Andrei Tarkovsky, the legendary Russian director behind such films as *Solaris* and *Andrei Rublev* (view *Under/Friction* at www.youtube.com/user/FerroAnthony).

Anthony talked up the Goddard program among his colleagues at Marymount, and the good word of mouth from him and others led four people associated with Marymount’s dance program – Pat Catterson, Safa Samiezade-Yazd, Elena Comendador and Kriota Willberg – to enroll.

As for tenure, Anthony earned that in September 2007.

“Goddard let me see that I could develop all the areas of my life and that I wasn’t doing that,” he says. “I’ll see how long I can keep it up.”



TOM CARAVAGLIA

fears about performing went away.

“I started to feel like I could trust just walking out there onstage,” he says.

In his next-to-last semester, Anthony submitted a draft of his final portfolio to his instructor. It was rejected.

“It’s just a report,” he says his advisor

I hope you are able to sense my lineage, begin to understand the consciousness of my thinking and how the embodied voice of my spirit continues to flow, dancing through time and space.”

None of this is to say that Anthony didn’t have any anxiety when he went

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told him. “You need to document your journey during the time you’ve been here. The portfolio should be a work of art unto itself.” Anthony didn’t see how he could make such substantial revisions in the span of just a semester.

“This kind of blew my mind,” he says. “I had a breakdown for three days, wondering if I could do it.”

In the end, Anthony did get all the work done. As part of his portfolio, he performed a 20-minute improvisational dance piece before his fellow students that he titled “Moments.” It was an autobiographical piece with a Buddhist meditative feel, and he performed it with

out to perform.

“I really wondered how it was going to float,” he says. But in the end, it floated so well that he expanded “Moments” to 40 minutes and performed it at the studios of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in New York.

Using what he learned about film

HITTING THE BOARDS Anthony performs “Moments,” an improvisational dance piece that originated from his studies at Goddard, with James Sutton, his husband and a professor at NYU, left page. BFA dance majors at Marymount Manhattan College perform “The Storm Awaits Its End,” a ballet Anthony choreographed, above. A portrait of Anthony, who has been honored for his community outreach programs fostering compassion through the arts.