

Expressions

PERFORMING ARTS ACADEMY

DANCE FACULTY



Abby Andre

Abby has a degree in middle childhood education and a minor in dance from Miami University. She is a former member of the Miami University dance team where she competed at NDA college nationals and performed at football and basketball games. She also works as an instructor for the Universal Dance Association. Abby is excited to share her love of dance with her students.

Amy Braheny

Amy is a seasoned dance educator with over 15 years of experience teaching in the Chicago land area. She began her dance training with The Berkshire Ballet Theatre in ballet, pointe, and modern dance, later earning a Bachelor's degree in Dance from the University of Iowa. She then went on to perform with a modern dance company (RDT), taught at local studios, high schools, and community education programs. Her passion for choreography continues to inspire new works as a guest artist. Amy is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of dancers and fostering a love of dance in her community.

Shannon Brodie

Shannon began her dance training in Downers Grove IL, and went on to receive her BFA in dance performance from Northern Illinois University. In 2007 she started her professional career by joining Chicago based, Nomi Dance Company. She has also worked with Winifred Haun and Dancers, Purus Motus, Meraki and Trifecta Dance Collective, where she continues to perform. Shannon has been teaching throughout the Chicagoland area for over 15 years and continues to enjoy sharing her love of dance with her students.

Jenny Fairman

Jenny has a BFA in Dance and BA in Enterprise Leadership, as well as a Certificate in Arts Entrepreneurship from the University of Iowa. She is a former member of the Hawkeye Marching Band where she served as a Section Leader and Recruitment Team Chair. Jenny grew up dancing at Lincolnshire Academy of Dance, and she has worked and taught at other park districts in the area. She is excited to share her love of dance with all of her students at EPAA!

Jennifer Hicks

Miss Jennie has trained at Dorothy's Dancing Unlimited, Dena Marie's studio, Lou Conte Dance Company, and Hubbard Street Dance Company. She has been a member of our dance faculty since 2005 and served as a director of our award-winning Vibe Dance Company for over 8 years, where her choreography has received numerous awards.

Gwen Jones

Gwen is a recent graduate from Northern Illinois University with a BFA in Dance Performance and a minor in Special Education. A BFA Dance Service award winner, Gwen had the opportunities to choreograph for individuals with disabilities through Penguin Players, as well as direct student-led shows. Currently, Gwen dances with the Meraki Dance Company in Aurora, IL. After her professional performance career, she plans to teach classes for individuals with disabilities.

Taylor Kalata

Taylor danced with Expressions Performing Arts Academy as a young dancer and was on Vibe Dance Company. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Engineering from Purdue University where she served as Head Choreographer for 2 years on Higher Ground Dance Company. Taylor is experienced in choreographing various styles including hip hop, jazz, lyrical, and contemporary.



Robin Kaiser

Robin has danced since the age of 4 at the Arlington Heights Park District and was a part of the competitive team, Vibe, for 10 years. She has trained in jazz, lyrical, contemporary, ballet, pointe, and tap. Throughout high school, she was a part of Hersey Orchestis and Poms, and she choreographed numerous pieces for these programs.



Kirsten Markham

Kirsten has been teaching dance for over 25 years in the Chicagoland area. She received her dance training through Ruth Page and Gus Giordano in addition to receiving her degree in Early Childhood Education. She choreographed a dance team for 10 years with North Shore Dance and Drama and was a company member of the Barefoot Hawaiian dance troupe.



Carla Ricchio

Carla has been with the Expressions dance program since 2002. She over 30 years of experience instructing dance. She was a member of her high school Orchestis team, the Harper College Dance Company, and she also performed in the Miss Illinois pageant. She attended classes at Gus Giordano and master classes with Randy Duncan. Carla was a Director for Vibe Dance Company for several years, where she instructed and choreographed competition pieces.



Alyssa Sugisawa

Alyssa has studied dance for over 20 years, including favorite genres of jazz, lyrical, and ballet. She has been teaching professionally for over 14 years and joined our Expressions Performing Arts Academy in 2012. She began working with Vibe Dance Company in 2014 and has won many awards, including "Excellence in Choreography" from the Power of Dance competition. Alyssa received her BFA from North Central College and strives to build her knowledge of dance.



Annabelle Thomson

Annabelle has danced with the Arlington Heights Park District since she was 3 years old. She has been on the competition team, Vibe, for the last 6 years in addition to training in multiple styles including jazz, lyrical, ballet, pointe, and contemporary. She is a member of the Hersey Orchestis Company and Varsity Dance Team. Annabelle has been an EPAA Dance Assistant and an Arts Alive counselor for the past two years. In her free time, she interns at a therapeutic school and is a counselor at Camp SOAR where she works one-on-one with students who have disabilities.



Heather Tomaino

Heather has studied many forms of dance since childhood. She received her degree at Texas Christian University, where she continued her education in dance. Heather has taught dance at many studios in the Chicagoland area, including dance schools in Itasca, Schaumburg and Palatine. She continues her dance education, attending numerous master classes in multiple techniques and enjoys sharing her dance knowledge.



Ashley Valencia

Ashley grew up dancing in Centennial, CO at Centerstage Starz Theatre and Dance Studio. She received her BFA in Dance from Stephens College in Columbia, MO, studying ballet, modern, jazz, tap, flamenco, Russian character, West African and choreography. Ashley has danced with Damsels, Matter Dance Company, Chicago Verge Dance Theatre and studied with Chicago Tap Theatre.



Lainey Winter

Lainey has been dancing since the age of 3, training, choreographing and competing in Contemporary, Modern, Lyrical, Jazz, Ballet, and Pointe. Her choreography has been selected for district and state-wide Orchestis showcases, and she was a member and choreographer for Vision Dance Company at Miami University. She holds degrees in dance and primary education, and she looks forward to sharing her creativity and love for dance!