

# CHATS & CONVERSATIONS

DEIDRE GOODWIN, ACTRESS, DANCER, CHOREOGRAPHER, EDUCATOR

March 31, 2017

\*\*\*

ST: Welcome Deidre. Let's begin by traveling back briefly to Springfield, Missouri and Missouri State University (formerly SMSU), what was your major when you first arrived on campus?

DG: When I first started I was a Communications major and then I took my first dance class during the first semester of my freshman year, so I switched by the end of my first year to Dance. My mom had no qualms with me switching to a Dance major, even though I literally had not had a dance class until my freshman year, as long as I had another major. So I had Electronic Media as my other major.

ST: Whose dance class did you take and encouraged you to pursue a dance major?

DG: It was Chyrel Miller. It's her fault. *(laughter)*

ST: What was it about her teaching or communication style that inspired you and gave you the confidence to pursue your dreams?

DG: I think it was a combination of things. I was completely naïve as to how hard this business is. I literally just did it because I loved it and it made me so frigging happy. I also loved and functioned well with criticism. She saw something in me and I wanted to do good for her as well and when she gave me a correction I said, "Got it." I may not have been able to apply it right away because I was just starting out and didn't have all the tools yet, but I understood what she was telling me and I was going to work towards that goal the hardest I could. I knew she believed in me and I knew I was having fun so I took any notes or critique she would give me and I would apply them the best I could in the moment and like I said, it would take longer to accomplish, but I would listen.

ST: And you wouldn't take that criticism personally because you knew she was there to help you?

DG: Exactly. Even if she said it in a sassy way, I was "Got it. Yes." If anything I would take her critiques and would hear them differently than perhaps if I had a different teacher, because she



took the time and it was clear. I never thought, “Oh, she hates me or I can’t do it.” It was, “Alright, that’s what we have to work on, let’s make this happen.”

ST: I’m assuming you did Tent Theatre? [*Missouri State’s long-standing summer theatre opened in 1963 and since 2008 operates under a full U/RTA agreement that allows collegiate stars to work side-by-side with theatre professionals from around the country.*]

DG. Yes. I did one year.

ST: Was it your senior year that you auditioned at the Mid-West Theatre Auditions?

DG. Yes, although wait . . . chronologically it took me five years to graduate because I added the other major after my first year. And I can’t remember if it was Mid-West or Straw Hat auditions, but after my final year I auditioned and got another summer stock job and that was in Sullivan, Illinois and that took me to Chicago, Illinois with Mark Robbins who was also a huge influence on me when I was young because he cast me in a show in Chicago which was at Drury Lane South. And from there, because of Mid-West auditions, I got a call while I was in Chicago because they needed girls to do a show that was going to Japan. I was living in Chicago with my friend, Jodi who also went to Missouri State and our friend, Michelle happened to be visiting that same week, so all three of us went to this random last minute audition and that audition only happened because of Mid-West. Someone had kept their notes and said, “Call and see if they are around.” And that’s when I went to Japan.

ST: What was the process of getting your Equity card?

DG: Well, I was there [in NYC] when they had half and half, remember that? So, I was able to go to Equity auditions even though technically I was not Equity. I understand why that got rid of that because I’d be pissed off if I was a full-paying dues member and there’s some little pipsqueak in the line in front of me, but that helped me to accrue points quicker and I fully got my Equity card after I was hired to do something at the Downtown Cabaret Theatre and then I got hired at Paper Mill [Playhouse, a Tony Award-winning regional theatre in New Jersey] and by then I was Equity.

ST: A through-line that has been apparent in the conversations I’ve been conducting is the importance of networking. A young performer often asks: “How do I network in a city whether it be New York, Chicago, Minneapolis or L.A. if I don’t know anyone?” What’s your advice regarding networking and how has networking benefited you over the years?

DG: Obviously I’m older and there’s been a huge shift in social media and the role that fortunately or unfortunately that plays now. But I found, for me personally, the biggest networking I ever did was going to auditions, because I was meeting people with the same interest as me. I didn’t view it as competition 101 as I always viewed myself as my biggest obstacle. (*Laughter*) You know what I mean? So if I was on my gig and I could do my best, great, but if I was self-sabotaging I wasn’t going to do my best. So, if I saw a girl that was 5’-8” and

black and she can sing, I never viewed it as competition (or a white girl or an Asian girl), you know what I mean? So, I use that time waiting (and dancers wait for hours), warming up and preparing to go into that room and you see the same people over and over and there's some people I've never done a show with, but I know them and they're great friends of mine because of that. And also, (I know they teach a little differently now), but I didn't have to work my survival job and if there was an audition, I'd go to it because I figured I'm putting myself in front of casting directors, even if it technically isn't the main casting director, it may be their assistant, but I'm still getting in someone's file and being seen. You're getting a free dance class. You're getting a free voice lesson and working on those things you need to work on anyway. And through doing shows and going to different events you'd meet more and more people and I was also doing benefits. I was never doing a benefit to network, it just turned out I would probably be meeting people a little different than those that might be in my regular circle. I think just being in the environment, taking classes in the city, whether it's dance class or whatever; you'll meet a whole different range of people. And now social media plays a part. I've now been casting on my own or helping people, like "I need someone to do so and so . . ." If I taught a dance class, I'll send them on. Or if I'm looking at someone and I'm thinking of using them I go on You Tube and see if there's anything online before I call them, before I see a bunch of people as time is limited. But I also think you have to be you because people can smell from a mile away if people think you're trying to work them or not. But if you happen to be in this room and you happen to be at this party and chat, chat, chat and just keep it moving. I think just go out and do things in the city.

ST: How important is it for a performer to simply be themselves at an audition?

DG: It's hard because you have this adrenaline in you. You're excited, you're nervous and it makes you crazy thinking, "What do they want? What do they want?" The thing you don't realize until you start auditioning a lot is you have to do what the role or show requires: sing, act, dance, gymnastics, ride a horse or whatever the show requires. But, at the end of the day, the director, the casting director, the choreographer and all players of the creative team are looking for "Who do I want to spend a lot of time with in a room? Who is a problem solver? Who helps other people? Who makes adjustments quickly? Who's pleasant?" That matters as much as anything else.

ST: Has the audition process changed over the years?

DG: Yes and no. People now can research you before you ever walk into a room. I always tell a story of a stage manager that I did a show with who knew that I knew a person the casting people were thinking of casting and there were some questions about her personality and behavior and he called me directly and said, "Can you talk to your friend because they're thinking of not hiring her because of X, Y and Z." I don't think people really understand how many of those phone calls happen. I do think it was inappropriate for the stage manager to call me, but I understand where his heart was. But, people check up on those things. I just saw on social media where someone posted online they had been in a particular show, and had listed the person casting as the choreographer. The person who's casting the show was like,

“Interesting, this person just auditioned for my college and they listed I choreographed a show they were in. I never choreographed that show and I never met that person.” People still lie on their resumes which is dumb.

ST: How does one handle the stress and balancing act of perhaps being in one show, auditioning in another and really wanting the show they just auditioned for, such as when you auditioned for the revival of *A Chorus Line*? [Students should check out the documentary, *Every Little Step*.]

DG: That’s a great question. I was doing another show during that process so I wasn’t as anxious about a job, although this was a job I would especially really, really like to get. But the stress is the same whether you are working or not. I think for stress in general in this industry you have to find a way to calm yourself down. I don’t know if that’s going to be church or meditation or volunteer at the veterinarian’s office, but you have to find something else to balance in this creative industry that at the end of the day is actually controlled by money, whether there’s money to produce a show or not. It’s out of your control. You cannot control it. If you need stability in your life you should not approach this career at all because it’s not stable.

I just did a TV show just the other day and I was talking with a series regular and I asked: “Can you still do [another] show ?” because their part is a series regular, but they’re not in every scene or every episode. And she said, “No, because they can call us anytime and if I do a play at night I might not be available.” It’s the golden cage. It’s a great opportunity to do things and for awhile it’s: “Oh, I got exactly what I wanted.” But then it’s, “Oh.” You know what I mean? I think with the stress of waiting you just have to know that’s the way it’s going to be. For TV you’ll probably find out quicker than film. With most shows (plays/musicals) it may stretch out for as long as mine did [several months with the revival of *A Chorus Line*] or some other shows. The thing is if you have a conflict, a true honest conflict and its like: “I have an offer for this show, but I really want to do your show. But I know you may not know for a few months.” You just tell them, “This is my situation. I’m going to lose this other job unless I find out.” It’s a negotiation and you have to have faith and you have to have patience and if you do not get the job it’s OK, because the job that’s right for you is just around the corner.

ST: You’ve noted in another interview and briefly in this one already, the importance of balance in your life outside of theatre. Have those experiences enhanced your work in the rehearsal hall and/or performance and if so, how?

DG: Oh yeah, because you don’t live in your own little box of theatre and it’s all about me and who got cast in what, and then it’s what are they doing, dada dada da. One of my least favorite questions on the planet is for someone to say to me: “Hey what are you up to?” That’s literally the lead-in. Not, “How are you?” For some people that aren’t in the business at all, it’s different for them and they just want to know and I understand that. But, people in the business they just assume or think or hope or want that you are doing something and they want to come and support you, but a lot of people are asking because they sort of want to keep tabs. It’s “Oh are you working? ‘Cause I am.” Or they’re using a lead-in so they can tell you what they’re doing?

It's all a little odd. I understand all of those reasons of why the question is asked, but I'm a big fan of, "Hey, how are you doing?" Because at the end of the day that's the only thing that really exists. Whether you are in a show, have a film coming out or producing an album, those things all go away. So, you have to have a life-line to draw upon to have the energy to go through the rehearsal process and eight shows a week if you're doing a national tour or Broadway and God willing, long running. You have to have a sense of who you are outside of the work, because when the work goes away you could potentially lose yourself. I'm a fan of being fully immersed in the project or whatever it is you're working on, but like I said, if that becomes too much of who you are, then who are you once that show closes?

ST: So, let me ask: "How are you Deidre?"

DG: I'm doing really well. I have a little back pain today, but I'm doing well. (*Laughter.*) Thank you for asking.

ST: Your career has a nice blend of theatre, film and television. Was it difficult to adjust from one medium to another and do you have a preference of one medium over another?

DG: Yes, I've been very fortunate. If *Chicago* [the musical] had not happened, *Chicago*, the movie would not have happened for me. And if *Chicago*, the movie had not happened for me the television and film trajectory would not have happened as fast or maybe not at all. It got me in the door that a girl dancing in the chorus might necessarily get, because there's a stigma with dancers I think a little bit. But yes, the learning curve for TV and film was harder for me because the show doesn't start at the top and finish at the end. We're doing this section of this scene on this day and "I know we blocked it this way, but now there's a big boom over here, there's a thing over here, you have to walk around that and do this, look natural and don't mess up." It's so technical from a different point of view. It's hard to find the flow sometimes. And you have no way of monitoring how you are doing or how you think you might be doing because you're filming in chunks and out of order and at the end of the day, the director, the producer and the editor craft your performance. So, you're hoping they take your best "takes". It's also really, really, really, really long hours. You have to keep your energy up while they're shooting and stay focused, so when they say, "Go" you are ready to go, because that's a skill. That's different than theatre.

Theatre of course, you do it, you're trying to make discoveries every night even though it's the exact same script, but it's different, fresh and alive and you instantly know where you're at with your cast mates, the audience, you get it, how you're riding that horse. I have shifted. I love theatre the most, but I don't necessarily have the same passion for performing on stage that I use to. That being said, I have the passion to create projects or help create projects or teaching people who want to do it and who know the best way to do it. I feel OK if I don't do a Broadway show again as I am actually . . . good. I acknowledge the passion and energy you have to have for it, otherwise it will drain you. I like the rehearsal room, which I've always loved. I love watching people figuring things out. I love figuring things out. I love it when the "Ah hah" thing

happens and the discovery of it all. That being said, TV pays a hell of a lot more, (*laughter*) although I think theatre is my true love.

ST: A call comes across the Equity hotline about an upcoming audition and it notes specific character requirements which might include info regarding gender, age, and ethnicity for example. If an actor or dancer doesn't fit the type described, should they go to that audition? And if so, will the casting director or director think an actor is just wasting their time or will they be open to the possibility of "What if?" and "Why not?"

DG: Absolutely. I do think you are going to find either a production or producer or casting director that may have something in mind or because of the work you've done they don't know you can do something different. There's going to be a stigma whether its race, non-traditional, something will be there or "You're a dancer, I didn't know you could sing", those kinds of things or vice-versa. I found I just didn't care. If I could go to an audition, I would just go to an audition because I figure, "Why not?" I mean the worst that could happen is, "OK, not this time, maybe next time." If you have the time to go somewhere and it's like: "We need all Pilipino people for this jazz dance concert." and I'm black, well, I'm like, I'm black and I'm a jazz dancer. I fit one of those. It's harder when you're fresh in the city because they have so many people for open calls and they have agent submissions and the director is going to bring in who they want to bring in, so time becomes an issue and that's why they "type out." That's why when you're fresh to the city it may be a hindrance, because you may not even get to sing your eight bars.

ST: When you're auditioning for a musical, do they just ask for a song?

DG: Yes. They'll have a "singer's who move" call and a "dancers who sing" call for a traditional musical opposed to a *Moving Out* or *Les Miz* which are very specific in terms of need. When I was starting out I would go to the "dancer's who sing" call first and if my work schedule didn't allow me to go for that, I would go to the "singers who dance" call and hopefully they'd let me dance as well. I would just figure out how to be seen. Because after awhile, the casting people would see me and say, "Oh, I remember her from so and so."

ST: Do cattle-call auditions still exist in NY?

DG: Oh yeah. My students go. They have to have an open-call and every show that's running has to have a six-month replacement call and very rarely does anyone get cast from these six-month Equity calls. But, you're being seen by these casting people who cast other things and you never know down the road if it may work out for that show or something else, so it's worth your time to go and the students I teach are definitely going to open calls right now.

ST: Let's chat about teaching for the moment. Who are you teaching? What are you teaching? And where are you teaching?

DG: I teach at the NY Film Academy which is a fairly new musical theatre conservatory. They have many programs such as producing, editing, directing for film and a theatre conservatory.

I'm one of the founding teachers there. The program has grown tremendously. I teach dance but I'm also involved in a lot of the other productions they do there and I'm also involved in the dance on film program there. I love it. We have a range of students. Some are international, some are non-traditional. Some have already finished their schooling, but they've always wanted to perform and this is their chance to dive in. Often the older students are better because they really, really want it and their brains understand they're going to have to work in the program. Some are American students and they just wanted to be in New York sooner. Some have their degrees from other schools already and they just wanted intensive training while in the city. But, I love teaching. I use a lot of Chyrel (Miller) and I've absorbed subconsciously some of what she would teach and I've gotten better at teaching a mixed level class, meaning someone that's never danced before in their life with someone who's been dancing since they were in the womb. I focus on keeping everyone engaged and challenged without being afraid. I've gotten better at how to teach different personalities and learning types in mixed environments as well which is kind of fun. It's another reason why I really love teaching.

ST: Taking another detour: I've had the pleasure to work at the Okoboji Summer Theatre in NW Iowa several times in recent years. It's part of the Stephen's College BFA Theatre program [located in Columbia, Missouri]. Stephen's is an all-female college which brings their rising seniors to Okoboji each summer to produce 9 shows in 10 weeks, plus 4 children's shows.

DG: What?! (**Note:** *OST has since cut back to 7 mainstage shows.* - ST)

ST: I know, it's pretty crazy. What's unique is they hire approximately 40 or so guest artists each summer to work alongside their students. Actors, directors, choreographers and designers from NYC, L.A., Washington D.C. and elsewhere. It's pretty impressive.

DG: That goes along with one of your earlier questions regarding networking. Things like that are great because they're meeting people in the business already who are either fellow performers or choreographers, directors or designers who are currently doing it and they're students that want to be those things or company managers or stage managers. The Performing Arts Project is good for that. Broadway Dreams is good for that. Those are ways a student is learning and not just there to smooze, but you're doing what you love.

ST: Tell me a little bit about your Broadway Warm-up DVD

DG: That was created after Kim Stern, a voice coach and teacher here in the city, she approached me through a mutual friend because she knew I was teaching and wanted to see if I would help her combine it because she found a lot of her voice students who were dancers, she would talk to them and ask, "What do you do for your vocal warm-up for an audition?" And they'd say, "Nothing." because they were embarrassed to sing or vocalize in front of the "singers". Or people that were singers would not do anything physical because they were either embarrassed or simply didn't know what to do. And she understands that the voice is influenced by what the body is doing and vice-versa. So why not create something and put it

together? So we developed it over quite awhile to discover exercises that I would do during warm-up and that she would do and then make them match up. And now we have a hard copy DVD but also recognize the need for a digital version which we now have available on Amazon and vimeo. You can rent it or you can purchase it. It's divided so you can get the whole enchilada or if you're a guy, you can get the boy version only or vice-versa. It's a great tool. It also incorporates what I was talking about earlier regarding a moment for calmness so you can learn to relax at rehearsals or before shows because sometimes we're so anxious and can't focus and have difficulty being where we are, so it includes that as well - all in 30 minutes.

ST: I will be sure to tell our students about that.

DG: If they're interested contact me because I have a discount code where they can get it for less. And Kim has also started a group on Facebook where people can ask questions of each other and there's also a challenge, a 30-day challenge where you can get the whole DVD free for a month and you talk about how it challenged you, etc.

ST: If there is one thing that an aspiring performer should know or do while they're in college, what would that be? What do we miss as professors in terms of letting students know what to expect?

DG: (*Without hesitation.*) Mainly, how to schedule your frigging time! Because you leave school where all of your classes are at a set time and if you're not there there is a consequence. You have X amount of dance classes, you know you have a voice lesson, you know you have this, that and the other. You know there are shows you can be cast in. And sometimes even if you don't get it you know, "Ah, I'll be cast again." Because there are only so many shows and so many people, right? So, once you leave school you go, "Oh, I haven't had a dance class for awhile." Why not? That's your fault. You knew that. Why didn't you do it earlier? You have to figure it out yourself how it goes and how to spend your time.

I also think performer or not, how to manage money is important because it's not cheap when you first start out. It's not cheap once you get going either. What we need and what we have to be constantly updating whether it's a new headshot or web site, learning new music, hiring an accompanist to play that music, external voice and/or dance classes, acting classes, because it doesn't stop, the training doesn't stop. There's private coaching, learning how to do your taxes and the resources that are available to help you with that. Knowing all the places to go that are free or don't charge as much or on a sliding scale whether it's your health, whether it's finances or time management, taking classes with a high value teacher and people in class with you. It's always changing which is why it can be hard for a school in Iowa where it may be difficult to know the latest new thing to target. I would also say, it's OK if you don't work right away. That doesn't mean it's over. Because you work so hard in NY, "I'm going to move to NY. I'm gonna get a job . . . and two years are gone and I've only done one industrial." Is that bad? No. It just means those are the odds. You just have to be patient with it all. You could also get it right away and then not work for another year.



ST: So, do you have that one role you've always wanted or a director or actor you've always wanted to work with?

DG: I'd love to play Lina Lamont in *Singing in the Rain*. I love the dingy blond characters, but I've always played the tough, mean or sexy kind of vibe, but I'm also extremely goofy and if I could just do a part that would let me be completely goofy and incorporate who I really am, that would be really fun.

ST: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think is important for students to know or perhaps for us to know about you?

DG: For students, you don't have to know it right away, but be OK with who you are and know that who you are is valuable as an artist. Because if we try to be . . . for example, if I want to be like Sutton Foster, I'm never going to be Sutton Foster. I don't dance like her, I don't look like her and we're different creatures. So as soon as you figure out who you are and recognize your talents are valuable, work towards that opposed to trying to sound like somebody else or dance like somebody else or mimic someone else. Know how that "E" sounds in your voice? How do you approach that note? Are you giving it everything you can? That would be my advice.

ST: As I look at your Broadway IMDB page I see you worked with Chita Rivera on *Chita Rivera: A Dancer's Life*. How was it working with such an icon?

DG: She was the shit. (Laughter) She is literary the most gracious, honest, all about gypsy and real person. She's also the epitome of old school show biz. I always kid her that she does two shows a night because she does the show and then has a receiving line and she has such energy and is ready and says, "Hi!" and honestly wants to meet everybody.

SG: Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and insights with me today and chatting one on one. It was fun.

DG: It was lovely talking with you as well.

\*\*\*