

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Connect to Axis Connect!

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, January 20th, 2016

Where can young emerging professional dancers go to get immersive experience from working choreographers and dance makers? What are their career choices in deciding between, say, Los Angeles and New York? How should they navigate between the commercial and concert worlds, and must they make a choice of one path over the other at all?

These questions and more are pressing decisions that young dancers are faced with at various junctures in their careers as emerging professionals. They scan the globe for dance schools, colleges, universities, and dance conventions. They look to agents, individual professionals, and each other for answers and examples of how and where to go for both training and work, and to understand how to broaden their experience and contact base in order to craft a career. They wonder at and search for prototypes of the paths available in dance, and which can provide them with a living wage.

Enter **Axis Connect**, the brainchild of Charissa and Cherice Barton, with input from their sister, renowned choreographer Aszure Barton of Aszure Barton and Artists. Charissa and Cherice first came to my attention last June and we quickly connected as friends and fellow dance makers. Charissa's dance short "Question of You" was featured last November on *ScreenDance Diaries*.

Recently I had a chance to speak to both of them and learn more about the inspiration behind the birth of **Axis Connect**.



Charissa Barton leaps (photo by Howard Schatz)

For over three years the Barton sisters were talking about working together. During that time both Charissa and Cherice had relocated to LA, and were approached by a filmmaker who was interested in creating a documentary about the three sisters. The filmmaker's idea was to see them working together creatively on something... *but what?* All three sisters had successful careers with dance and beyond, each taking separate routes. What if together they culled from what would be, cumulatively, a valuable set of resources to create an intensive program for young dancers that not only gave them technical training, but exposed them to choreographers, agents and other resources? Realizing the above questions and more were frequently going unanswered for young aspiring professional dancers, the documentary aside, Charissa and Cherice quickly found themselves inspired by who they could pull together from the world of dance, and what everyone could contribute in this arena. "*This... The educational platform for young dancers, was really tapping into an area that was greater than us,*" said Charissa.



Axis Connect flier

Launching this February in both New York and Los Angeles, Charissa explains: “**Axis Connect** will be a two week, intensive and immersive platform that will give participants exposure in terms of the full range of what’s possible in their careers as dancers and also in their lives as artists. We will be bringing in really high-level artists to give them choreography, genre, dance on camera, and more, and putting that into the context of the dance world, and the world in general.” In addition to classes, **Axis Connect** will incorporate lectures from professionals speaking about practical subjects like how to manage money, when and how to get an agent, dealing with stress and rejection etc. — information that can carry participants through their lives as artists. Other lectures will include people just coming in and talking about their career trajectories. Guest teachers and lecturers include Vincent Patterson (Michael Jackson, Madonna), Sonya Tayeh (SYTYCD), Alexandra Damiani (Cedar Lake), Billy Bell (SYTYCD), Jim Keith (President, Movement Talent Agency) and yours truly amongst others. Students will learn repertoire from contemporary choreographers including Hofesh Schechter, and of course Aszure Barton, whose company is booked for the next two years, will be part of it. At the end of the two week intensive, there will be a multi-faceted event in which the dancers will have a chance to perform their immersive work, live and otherwise.

“We really want to encourage emerging professionals, to find a way to bring them in, hook them, by creating a platform that will be a supportive community for the rest of their years,” says Cherice. Showings will invite potential employers, agents, directors, choreographers, etc., giving the opportunity for participants to be seen and best of all, *hired*. Different from other intensives, dance camps, and conventions where classes frequently find students squished into a ballroom with 200 others, in **Axis Connect** participants will be in a program with 25 other students, receiving a lot more personalized attention. While the Bartons encourage participation in both the NY and LA portion, as the two cities represent very different worlds in terms of opportunities, cost of living, career direction, and more, students can elect to do only one city.



Cherice & Charissa Barton (photo by Richard Corman)

In speaking to them, the passion of the Barton sisters for **Axis Connect** is palpable. They are excited to offer options, coalesce some amazing teachers, connect dancers to dance makers, and best of all, to create community,

Interested? Auditions are necessary and will take place February 6 -7 in NYC, and Feb 20 -21st in LA. The **Axis Connect** intensive will take place this summer in NYC July 24 – 29th, and in LA August 1 – 6.

Don’t wait... To learn more or to **pre-register online** visit: theaxisconnect.com And check out the amazing **Axis Connect** reel below.

See you at **Axis Connect**!

<https://vimeo.com/143946371>

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