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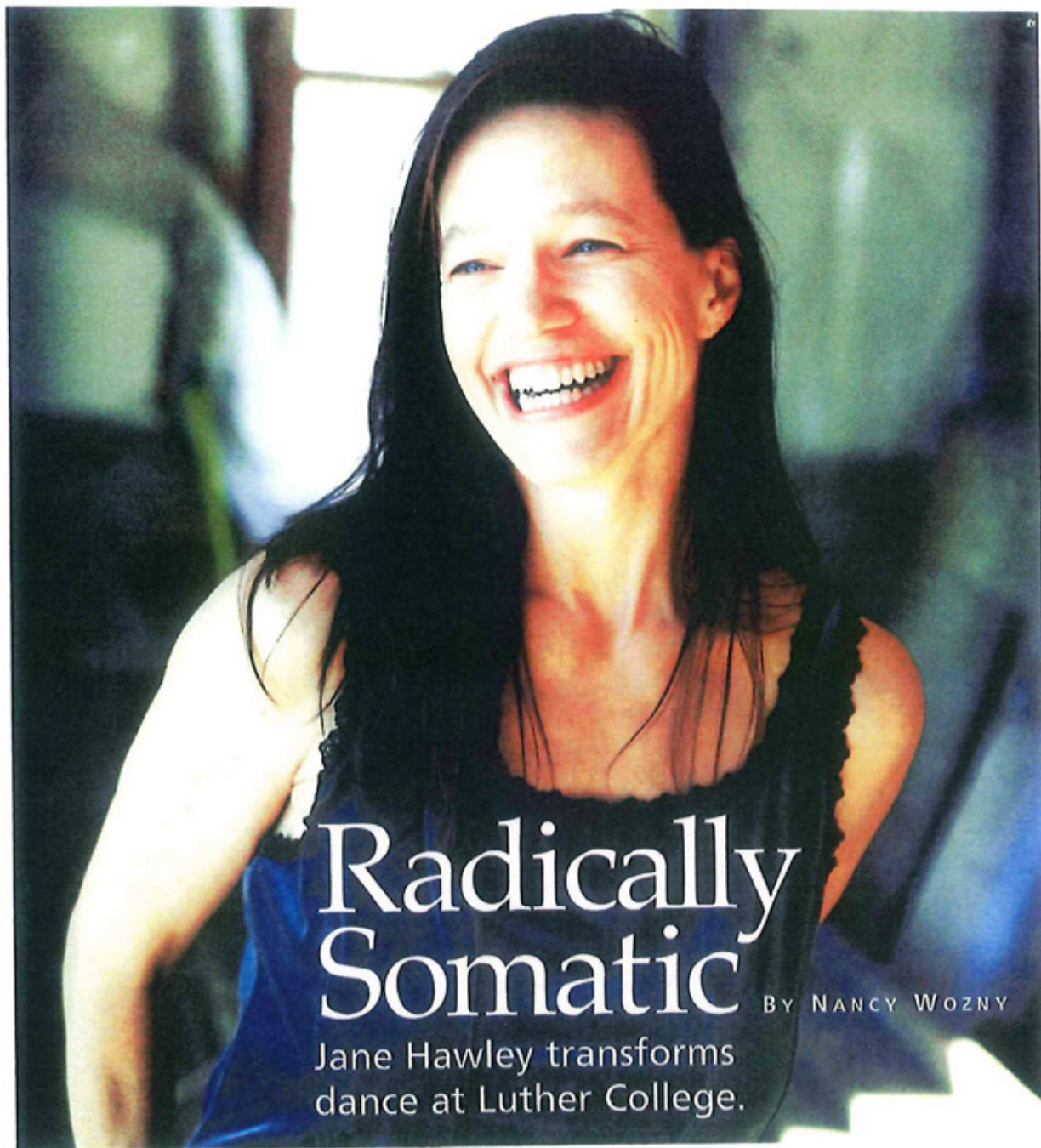
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Jane Hawley



Photos by Silver Moon Photography, courtesy of Luther College

# Radically Somatic

BY NANCY WOZNY

Jane Hawley transforms dance at Luther College.

One rarely sees dancers all moving in unison, or even doing a recognizable step in Jane Hawley's classes. You are more likely to see a community of movers exploring a particular idea, each finding a unique way into the material. If you look for dance classes at Luther College, in Decorah, Iowa, you won't find anything called ballet, modern, or jazz, either. Instead, there's Movement Fundamentals, Hawley's groundbreaking dance curriculum culled from somatic and scientific movement studies. When it comes to the mind-body connection and dancing, she sees no reason to compromise. Why sneak a little somatic knowledge into the dance class when there is enough material to fully transform a

dance program, which is exactly what Hawley did when she took the dance program helm at Luther in 2000.

Hawley is more of a somatic synthesizer than a subscriber to just one school of thought, gathering her influences from a range of such pioneers as Andrea Olson, Mabel Todd, Lulu Sweigard, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Stanley Keleman, Peggy Hackney, and Joseph Chilton Pearce. Studies in contact improvisation with Nancy Stark Smith and Martin Keogh provided a crucial framework for her program.

Although Hawley has always been curious about how her body worked, she didn't start formal dance training until she was 19, and a

theater student at Luther. "I took my first dance class in my bathing suit because I didn't have the right clothes," she recalls Hawley. She credits her teacher Vicky Blake for introducing her to a variety of dance styles, from ballet to world dance. Hawley discovered she had a natural facility for understanding how movement is executed throughout the body, and an ability to pick up pattern and shape. She continued her training at The Alvin Ailey School in New York and at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she earned her MFA.

Hawley's first contact with mind-body material came in grad school when Integrative Respiratory Technique was recommended to help her recover from a serious illness. "Something shifted in my bodily intelligence that transformed my dancing," she remembers. After graduate

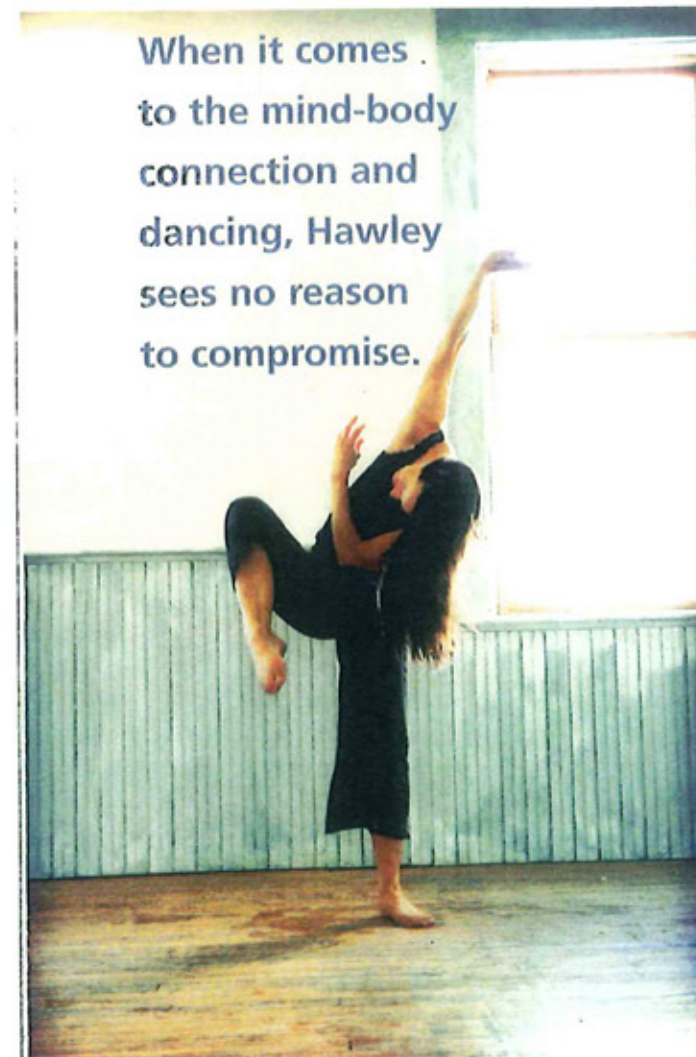
school she spent several years experimenting with how best to integrate somatic studies into a dance curriculum. Working simultaneously with children and dance students at Interlochen Center for the Arts, she developed the seeds of what would become the curriculum for Movement Fundamentals. The 44-year old petite brunette now offers her own ever-growing fluid movement as solid evidence of the validity of her process.

Movement Fundamentals is divided into three semester-long classes— I: Practices of Alignment and Function introduces basic somatic practices such as ideokinesis, dynamic alignment, and functional anatomy; II: Practices of Range and Efficiency builds on the mind-body vocabulary and integrates the Bartenieff Fundamentals into dance technique; and III: Practices of Vocabulary and Intention delves into Laban Movement Analysis and performance.

Dance majors take the last two sections twice to deepen the experience. They also take classes in composition, dance history and a performance practicum. Classes emphasize proprioception and imagery rather than traditional dance steps. Students play, investigate, and experiment from verbal instructions that focus the exploration. According to Hawley, there are plenty of codified somatic practices on hand to replace the usual structure of a dance class. "We use ideokinesis, constructive rest, the language of directions through space for spatial intent, Bartenieff Fundamentals, developmental movement patterns from Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and Lulu Sweigard's nine lines of movement. All the vocabulary is based in anatomical terms rather than the traditional French terminology."

The studio features a picture window that looks out on a sloping hill and cedar trees. There are no mirrors, but a skeleton is always handy. "The trees form a visual reminder of the pathways of the human nervous system," observes Hawley. "There's no front of the class, either, reshuffling the usual hierarchy of the teacher-student relationship." Although Hawley believes the body itself provides the essential encyclopedia, she also uses seminal texts such as *Olsen's Bodystories: A Guide to Experiential Anatomy and Somatic Reality* by Stanley Keleman.

The department is small. With 30 theatre/dance majors and upper division class



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size averaging from eight to 12, there's plenty of time for the two faculty members to work closely with each individual. There are no auditions, nor is previous dance training required. Technical levels are mixed from those with 16 years of training to total beginners. "Because our territory is the body, those with extensive traditional training may find themselves limited in other capacities," says Hawley. "I consistently find in both trained and untrained dancers a need to practice moving through space with a clear intention and initiation. Both types of students influence each other quite beautifully."

The dance curriculum is also available for all students regardless of paths of study. "We have students that go on to get their MFAs in dance as well as biology majors," says Hawley. "We are all studying the body and we can carry that education into anything we do." Lucy Schultz (class of 2004) majored in philosophy and art, but she used Hawley's classroom as a laboratory to investigate the mind-body connection, and says it inspired her current doctoral work in philosophy at the University of Oregon.

When Lynn Bowman arrived at Luther with a traditional dance background, she wasn't sure what to make of Hawley's approach. After seeing the impact it had on her own choreography, she climbed on board. "I started to understand that

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—Jane Hawley

dance is not just training my body to point my foot in a room. Jane urged us to bring our outside lives into dancing. She's also incredibly charismatic, and truly interested in developing creative, accountable citizens, who take responsibility for their own education," says Bowman, who is now an Iowa Arts Fellow at The University of Iowa finishing her MFA in dance. "She gave us the license to find our own dance. My own body became a tool for dancemaking. Now, I layer Movement Fundamentals into my dancing in any kind of class."

Hawley is most proud of her injury-free record for the past nine years. "Our students expect to remain healthy," she says. "It's not that we don't get the usual aches and pains, but we know how to get back to neutral. Our students develop an internal intelligence, and in that way, they become their own best doctor." But the ultimate reward is in her students' dancing, which she claims becomes downright "juicy." Her approach creates not only a smart mover but an expressive mover, as discovering body knowledge goes hand in hand with the creative process. Her methods have gained the attention of both the dance education and somatics community. She's presented at the National Dance Educators Organization, International Association for Dance Medicine and Science, and the Motus Humanus-Laban Institute of Movement Analysis.

Hawley delights in following the careers of her students and their wide-open approaches to carrying her work into the world. She remains deeply respectful of dance traditions, but questions the assumption that there's only one way to train a dancer. "What if we view dance artists as we do other artists in that we don't train painters to mimic Picasso. I am interested in producing dancers that look like themselves, not me," she says. "They are going out and doing their own thing with this material, which is terrifically exciting." ■