

Blog: The Second Company Conundrum

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It's the start of a new season, and many pre-professionals will be making the transition from top student to second company member. Being in a second company is one of the trickiest stages of a dancer's career: It's an opportunity to launch your professional life, but there are no guarantees that you'll be asked to stay with the organization after your one- or two-year contract is up. How can you make the kind of impression that leads to a main company offer? Alfonso Martin, artistic manager of Tulsa Ballet II, shares his advice for newbies.

What's the most difficult part of transitioning into life as a second company member?

Getting used to being completely out of your comfort zone. These dancers go from having been top students under the umbrella of their teacher to working their way up from the bottom.

How should a dancer approach the change?

Keep an open mind. You're going to rehearse like a professional dancer, meaning you'll be asked to dance not only with technique but also with emotion—and that's not an easy task. For our repertoire, dancers need to be prepared to dance not only classical ballet but also contemporary pieces.

What can second company members do to make a good impression?

Be professional. You need to be 100 percent committed to being in the studio learning, applying corrections and trying your best, as well as working on your own time. Take advantage of the opportunities you're given—they're a test, not a guarantee of a contract. And most importantly, be yourself. Don't pretend to be somebody else.

Are there any common mistakes you see second company members make?

Second company dancers too often think they're part of the organization, and that with just the minimum amount of work they will get into the main company. This is just the beginning of your career. Your work now determines whether you'll get into the main company here or end up using the experience to enter another company.

Who should second company members turn to if they are struggling?

I would hope that they could come to the leader of the second company—a person like myself—for good advice. We want them to be successful in their careers, regardless of whether they are hired by Tulsa Ballet. The goal is to guide them into the professional world and get them ready for the challenges ahead.

What's your advice for the new TBII dancers?

My advice to them is to ask themselves, "What did I come here for? To work hard and hopefully enter into the professional world, or to have some fun in a new environment?" I ask my TBII dancers for a full commitment to every single rehearsal. A dance career is quite short. When you look up, you'll find it's time to do something else. Take every day as a new experience, and set a goal to make it better than the day before.

Tulsa Ballet II kicks off its season September 6 with a program called On Your Radar. It's the first time a TBII performance has been billed alongside the main company as part of the Tulsa Ballet season.



Alfonso Martin rehearses TBII